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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

TRUE STORIES: LIFE-WRITINGS OF FRONTIER WOMEN, 1850-1930

BY

LAURA ELIZABETH CHURCH ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall 1992

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ISBN 0-315-77383-9

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DEGREE: Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the importance of life-writing to frontier women, particularly in its relation to selfhood. Frontier women found that cultural constructions of womanhood failed to fully represent their experiences as women. Life-writing, however, allowed them to create their own representations of themselves, representations which modified these cultural constructions to reflect their individual experiences. In addition, life-writing provided frontier women with a means of communicating these representations of themselves to others so that they could see frontier women as they saw themselves. Life-writing was important to frontier women because it allowed them to discover, construct and validate a self which they felt truly reflected them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Shirley Neuman for her patience, guidance and encouragement. I would also like to express my gratitude to my family for their unfailing support and understanding.

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INTRODUCTION

Between 1840 and 1930, millions of women, either alone or with their families, came to western North America to participate "in a unique human experience--the settlement and development of" the western frontier (Myres xvi). Settling first in California and Oregon, they were a portion of the 350,000 people who made the five to six month journey across the Overland Trail (Jeffrey 25) between 1841 and 1867 (xi). By the 1870's, as the wave of emigration "rolled back," they "began to trickle into the unsettled areas between the Mississippi and the Pacific" (xi), settling the "prairies of Minnesota, the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Kansas" (27). By the 1880's, they had moved into the "chancy, arid frontier sweeping from the Dakotas and Montana on the north to Texas on the south" (28), and, by 1893, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner declared, "the era of the frontier had finally come to an end" in the United States (Jeffrey xii). At about this time, the Canadian frontier was really just opening up. Although settlers had trickled into western Canada as early as the 1870's and 80's, massive emigration to the West began only in 1896, largely as a result of efforts by the CPR and the Canadian government to publicize the free land available there (Harvest Yet to Reap 13). During the period of greatest migration, 1900 to 1911, 900,000 men, women and children came to western Canada (13).

Among the historical accounts of this period are the personal stories of the women who took part in the settlement of the West. I think of the stories told within my own family. I think of my great-grandmother Agnes McLaughlin, for instance. Born and raised in Ontario, at sixteen she was put on a train bound for Wetaskiwin, Alberta. There were too many children in the family and her parents could not support her, so they sent her West to teach school and support herself. She arrived in Wetaskiwin in the middle of the night. A local family had been arranged to meet her, but, due to some miscommunication, they were not expecting her until the next day. So this young girl, away from her family for the first time in her life and stranded in the middle of nowhere, simply sat down and waited all night on the station platform for someone to come and retrieve her.

Eventually, someone did come for her and she went on to teach in the typical one-room schoolhouses of the time. Later, she married a young horse rancher and started a family. Her husband, unfortunately, was "not a very good manager" and as a result the family found themselves in danger of losing their property. So, with the fortitude which had helped her to survive the rigors of the frontier up to this point, she picked up her three children and went out teaching again in one-room schoolhouses across Alberta, taking her wages in eggs, potatoes, milk and whatever else the local farmers could spare.

Another one of my great-grandmothers, Annie Black, withstood similar hardships. In the beginning, she had no intention of going West. When her husband and her father decided to take a trip to Alberta to check out homesteading opportunities, she told them, "You two can go out and look all you like, but I'm not going anywhere!" A year later she found herself with an infant on her hip and living in a shack on the outskirts of Calgary. The first few years of homesteading were especially tough as they were for most pioneers and, as the story goes, she later told her granddaughters, "If I had had the money I would have been gone out of here like a shot, but there wasn't any money so where was I to go?" Although times were tough, it is worth noting that my grandmother does not really believe that her mother would have ever left her father, for she says "they did everything together."

Many frontier women, including my great-grandmothers, kept written records of their experiences--diaries, letters and memoirs--what we today refer to as life-writings.[1] In fact, the number of accounts tucked away in descendants' closets and dresser drawers, preserved in historical collections and, in some cases published, is really quite staggering given the difficult circumstances in which these women were writing. They were usually overworked, frequently ill and always tired. From morning to night there was always someone or something that needed a frontier woman's attention. There was the cooking, washing, sewing and gardening to do, the livestock to be cared for, the children to be supervised. Peace and quiet and time to one's self were hard won. As a result, most women took up their writing "after the rest of the household [had] gone to bed or before anyone was up in the morning" (Hampsten, Read This ix). A typical entry from the diary of Emily French, a working-class woman from Denver, epitomizes the kind of workdays many of these women faced as well as the state they were in when they finally took up their pens:

> I up at 5 and went to work washing. Kiner sent his, Frank Cole came, brought a big bundle. I began to pick up, got the first out on the line 9 oclock, all done & ironing at 3, she will be glad. Packed and fixed till 1 A.M., am writing now, so tired I can scarcely see the lines (emphasis added). (101)

Why was writing so important to frontier women that they pursued it despite such formidable obstacles? This is what I wanted to know.

I sought my answer from the texts themselves. I put together a sample of frontier women's life-writings, not "a scientific random sample," as Nancy Cott puts it, but "a sample" (Bonds of Womanhood 11). I limited myself to published texts but chose to include both American and Canadian sources. As a result, because the American and

Canadian frontiers were settled at different times, I have texts which begin as early as the 1850's in the United States as well as ones written as late as the 1920's in Canada. Although this involves comparing texts from a seventy year time gap, I have felt at liberty to do so because the conditions under which the frontier was settled were virtually the same in 1850 and 1930. I did, however, limit myself to certain portions of the American and Canadian frontier, focusing primarily on the "agricultural frontier" of the plains in both countries (Jeffrey xiv). Thus, I discuss texts from Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nebraska, Colorado, Montana, New Mexico and Wyoming. The one exception is a source written by a British Columbian woman. As for the women themselves, the majority of the thirteen texts I discuss were written by middle-class white women involved in either farming or ranching. I have, however, also included, for comparison, three texts written by working-class women. Clearly, all of these women were literate, but not all had received formal educations. Some had received training as teachers while others had not received even an adequate primary school education. In one capacity they were all alike, however. They all possessed the basic conditions necessary for writing, having access to time (however limited), materials and motivation (Bloom 794).

When dealing with published texts, one must ask who got published and why. These questions are particularly problematic where women writers are concerned. Seldom in history has their autobiographical writing been considered worthy of publication. A common assumption has been that "women's autobiographies, because they emanate from lives of culturally insignificant people, are themselves culturally insignificant" (Smith 14).[2] Similarly, as Elizabeth Hampsten points out, heirs and archivists have often failed to systematically keep manuscripts of frontier women's life-writings because they lacked "historical value," that is, they did not refer to "memorable events or notable persons" (Read This vii). Many times, they have been discounted because "they were merely about daily events" (xi). Moreover, when women's life-writings have been saved and, indeed, published, it has often been because their authors were "noticed for not being like other women" (Hampsten, Read This 2). Given such conditions, we are forced, at the very least, to acknowledge that, whatever conclusions we might come to, they are always limited by and to the texts which have found their way into publication.

Among the texts chosen for this study, approximately a third were published soon after the time of writing. Two of the sources are collections of letters which were first published in the Atlantic Monthly and then in book form.

Two others are memoirs originally published by the Houghton Mifflin Company. In most cases, these texts came to be published as a result of the efforts of interested friends who acted as intermediaries between the publishers and the authors. Although this indicates that there was some contemporary interest in frontier women's lives, we still know very little about why these particular texts were deemed worthy of publication. By contrast, the majority of the texts used in this study have been published only recently. They are the diaries, letters and memoirs which have been saved from obscurity as a result of the current interest in women's history and the efforts of dedicated scholars. Even here, however, we must again wonder what the basis was for choosing to publish these particular texts. There is, for example, perhaps a danger of being partial to those texts which appeal to our modern sensibilities.

Finally, I must take into consideration my own biases. I have chosen texts which appeal to me and they form but a small sample of all frontier women's life-writings. Still, if my conclusions do not apply to all frontier women, they certainly apply to a particular group of them, and one cannot deny their experiences simply because they cannot be generalized to all frontier women.

CHAPTER ONE - THE LIVED MOMENT

The women who helped settle the western frontier of Canada and the United States were a diverse group. They came from the cities, towns and rural communities of Eastern Canada and the United States, the American Midwest and the South, as well as from Europe. They were the wives and daughters of farmers, ranchers, miners, bankers, shopkeepers, soldiers and lawmen. In their own right, they were school teachers, seamstresses, laundresses, domestics, and homesteaders, outlaws and prostitutes. Yet society expected all of these women to conform to one, very narrow definition of womanhood, a definition prescribed by an ideology of gender known as the cult of True Womanhood.

The cult of True Womanhood emerged as an ideology in the nineteenth century in conjunction with, and as a result of, industrialization in the northeastern United States. Prior to industrialization, in the early years of American (and Canadian) settlement, the production of goods had been centred in the home. Families were by necessity self-sufficient, producing for themselves what they needed to survive. Because the work was labour intensive, it required the efforts of all members of the family. Both men and women worked to feed, shelter and clothe their families. However, as these early communities became more "stable," "structured" and prosperous, the production of goods moved away from the home and into the marketplace (Myres 6). Men followed the production of goods into the marketplace, working in "factories, shops, and businesses" (Jeffrey 5) while "producing goods and services for monetary gain" (Myres 6). Women remained in the home and continued to work at various sundry tasks but no longer "produced vital goods or earned much money" (Jeffrey 5). Consequently, women's work, because it was not essential to the family economy, became "secondary" and "subordinate" to the labour of their men (Myres 6).

"Banned from the marketplace and displaced from their earlier economic roles within the family," women took on a new role within society, a role which developed directly in response to the rapid and sometimes frightening changes occurring in American society (Myres 6). As industrialization progressed, "fortunes rose and fell with frightening rapidity," and "social and economic mobility provided instability as well as hope" (Welter 104). What concerned society even more than the changes themselves, however, was that they seemed to be accompanied by an erosion in moral values. Society's response to this was to fix its moral and cultural values in women. As the public world was increasingly thought of as "competitive," "dangerous" and "destructive" (Jeffrey 6), as men increasingly "neglected" the "religious values of [their] forbears" (Welter 103), women increasingly became defined as the "repository of true virtue" (Myres 6). Women now had a new role in society. It was their "responsibility" to "[maintain] values and [ensure] social stability in a time of rapid change; women were ultimately responsible for the national welfare" (Jeffrey 6).

Women were not to perform this role in public, however. The world of trade, commerce and politics was clearly now men's sphere of influence. Women's sphere of influence was the private world of the home. It was within this domestic world that women performed their societal duties by "communicating moral and cultural values . . . to their families" (Jeffrey 6). Women, the embodiment of goodness, communicated these values mainly through the example of their own behavior. A True Woman, as she became defined, was

> modest, submissive, educated in the genteel and domestic arts, supportive of her husband's efforts, uncomplaining, a perfect wife and mother, and an example to all. (Myres 6)

Of course, this definition of True Womanhood never reflected the reality of most women's lives. It was a definition which evolved to accommodate the specific social and economic changes occurring in New England between "1830 and 1860" (Jeffrey 7). As such, it applied "only" to the urban "middle-class and upper-class families" which "could allow their women to retire into domesticity" (Myres 7). "Many women simply could not afford the luxury of the pedestal" (7). Still, this model of womanhood was upheld as the ideal to which all women were to aspire. Moreover, it was incredibly pervasive as an ideology. Propagated by a "new popular literature", it filtered down to all levels of society (Cott, Bonds of Womanhood 8). "Advice books, sermons, novels, essays, stories, and poems," written by both men and women, "[advocated] and [reiterated] women's certain, limited role" (8).

The conditions of the western frontier, however, challenged and undermined this notion of True Womanhood. As families made the trek west and sought to reestablish homes and communities, they once "again had to become self-sufficient" (Myres 7). The efforts of men, women and children were all required to ensure the survival of the family, and although people continued to assume that certain tasks were essentially men's or women's work, gender roles became blurred. Women worked in the field, cared for livestock and fought prairie fires, while men could, when necessary, cook, wash clothes or care for the children. Indeed, in the struggle for survival, women regained their earlier economic role as workers. Often, in the first few years of homesteading, before a crop could be harvested, women kept the family going by raising and selling poultry as well as butter, cheese and eggs. Even once the farm was established, women continued to do the "spinning, sewing, soap- and candle-making, butchering and baking" that "were critical to the sustenance of the family" (Silverman xi).

Women reacted to the frontier and the demands placed upon them in different ways. Those who identified closely with the ideal of the True Woman often did not cope well.

Such women were accustomed to a comfortable, genteel life and the frontier made it impossible for them to live up to their former standards. In the beginning especially, their frontier homes were bare and makeshift, their children sometimes lacked a decent education and access to culture, the family was often poorly clothed and there was usually little money for luxuries. Such things distressed frontier women who were in danger of failing as True Women. Nell Wilson Parsons, for instance, in her memoir Upon a Sagebrush Harp frequently recalls her mother's resentment of the family's poverty as they struggled to make a living off their Saskatchewan homestead. Her mother had been raised in a family of some means in England and knew what nice things were. Parsons writes:

> "I'd like the children to know what it is to live nice," she said, "It is hard when we lack so much." . . . . Mama had known a different life in her English girlhood. She came from a genteel home where massive oak furniture stood about, where rugs covered the floors, where there were velvet hangings and CHINA.
>
> Thumbing through Eaton's mail order catalogue, she was apt to linger on the pages showing sets of dishes. There was one said to have green sprigs on each of the more than one hundred pieces in the set. Twelve of everything--wide-rimmed soup plates, tiny butter chips, bread and butter plates, dinner plates and cups and saucers--on through the long list.
>
> "Be nice to have twelve cups, with the handles on." Mama's eyes would grow soft with longing. (59)

Nell Parsons' mother wanted to provide her daughters with the upbringing she had known, the one which she knew her nieces in England were receiving. She couldn't but feel inadequate, given her standards, when she compared her daughters' lifestyle to that of their cousins:

> Aunt Sarah's last letter from England had been full of news of our cousin Amy, who was a year younger than I. Amy was taking vocal lessons; Amy had been chosen for the lead in the Christmas Cantata; Amy was taking dancing lessons, too. Aunt Sarah sent a swatch of the costume material, spangled net over cerise taffeta. A fairy fabric to my eyes.
>
> At Christmas, Rena and I would wear the horrid hand-knitted long stockings over our long underwear, and multiple layers of flannel petticoats under our serviceable made-over dresses.
>
> "I know, Annie," Papa said gently in reply to Mama's comment about Christmas in England, "I know the kids haven't much in the way of material advantages. These first years are tough going. But we'll have something ahead for them in the long run." (101)

It wasn't just that their children were missing out that bothered these women, however; what also concerned them was what other women, women who did not understand the difficult circumstances they were living under, might think of them. Grace Snyder, for example, in her memoir No Time on My Hands, recalls her mother's reaction to the news that their grandmother from the east was coming for a visit:

> Mama held the letter in her hand a long time, a stricken look on her face . . . . Poor Mama. She knew how raw and bare our prairie home would seem to her mother, and she overtaxed her frail strength trying to make it seem better than it was. (43-44)

While most women simply tried to "make do" the best they could with meager resources, creating appetizing meals with few ingredients, making-over old dresses into children's clothing, adding personal touches to their homes, and instructing their children themselves, some women simply could not cope. Mollie Dorsey Sanford's mother, for example, was so mortified at the prospect of trying to properly entertain two unexpected guests with her meager provisions, she simply fled the house, leaving her daughters to entertain the unexpected visitors. Sanford later described the incident in her journal, writing:

> Having no milk, no butter, eggs, nor vegetables, it seemed a gloomy prospect, for those that wished to be hospitable. Mother, who feels our circumstances more keenly with her proud English spirit, took the babies and fled to her retreat in the woods, where she often goes to gain her equilibrium. (36-37)

It is not surprising that some women responded to the primitive conditions of the frontier in such a way, for they threatened to destroy a True Woman's very identity. The activities and behaviors which had once validated her as a woman were now often impossible to achieve. No doubt it was these women who were the origin of an image of the frontier woman which would become "deeply embedded in the American mind" via literary and historical accounts (Myres 1). It was an image which portrayed the frontier woman as a "frightened, tearful woman wrenched from home and hearth and dragged off into the terrible West where she [was] condemned to a life of lonely terror among savage beasts" (1).

But not all women felt this way. Younger women, especially if they were children, often adapted better to the frontier than older women. Daughters were more likely than their mothers to embrace their new lifestyle. Daughters, because of their youth, had "only lightly" "ingrained" in them the "prescriptions" of True Womanhood and therefore felt less compulsion to subscribe to them (Schlissel 150). Indeed, they were quite happy to be free from the confines of such a narrow definition of womanhood and rejoiced at the opportunity to take on new roles, new challenges, and to discover for themselves what they were capable of. Mollie Dorsey Sanford, for example, viewed her family's move to Nebraska's frontier as an opportunity rather than a privation:

> Mother hardly enters into extacies [sic]. She no doubt realizes what it is to bring a young rising family away from the advantages of the world. To me, it seems a glorious holiday, a freedom from restraint, and I believe it will be a blessing to we girls. We were getting too fond of style. (33)

Similarly, Grace Snyder writes that to her and her sister their new homestead looked "all new and interesting, but to Mama it must have seemed poor and desolate" (16). While Nell Wilson Parsons' mother fretted over the disadvantages of raising her children on the frontier, her children declared they "were unaware of any lack. Life was full and exciting. We lived in the most wonderful spot in the world" (59). Certainly, for some little girls the frontier was a blessing, for it provided them with an expanded arena in which to be tomboys. Snyder was thrilled when her mother finally made her a pair of jeans and a jacket out of denim. To her, the discovery of lice in her hair turned into an "unexpected blessing" because it meant she could have a "new, short, 'boy' haircut" (81). When, at the age of five, her father asked her if she thought she could look after herding the cattle, she recalled thinking:

> I knew I could. I didn't like housework anyway, and to be Poppie's boy and have him call me "Pete," and to spend all my days out of doors--well, it seemed to me that was all I could ever want. (48)

For many young girls, the frontier represented freedom, freedom from the restrictive social customs which had previously governed their behavior. They viewed their new environment as a vast and infinitely interesting playground in which they were often allowed, and frequently required, to overstep gender expectations.

Young adult women were also attracted to the freedom of the frontier and frequently comment on it in their life-writings. Nannie Alderson, for example, writes of the year she visited her aunt in Kansas with great enthusiasm: "The year I was sixteen a new world opened up before me . . . . What an experience that was! . . . I felt that the very air there was easier to breathe" (8). In contrast to the old, established societies these women had come from, frontier societies were new and informal. Individuals had greater freedom because they did not have to observe rigid social conventions. Indeed, Monica Hopkins described the frontier as a tremendously liberating place:

> It is a glorious life and even if we don't make our fortunes we are getting a great deal of joy and fun out of living. We are able to do _what_ we like, _when_ we like, and _how_ we like, and not many of you poor people who live in cities can say that! (57)

Alderson was also pleased by the fact that people on the frontier did away with what she considered "foolish conventions" and was entranced by the informality of social relations (8). She was particularly delighted that young women could go out to work and still maintain their social standing in the community. She realized that employment could not only fulfill a young woman's ambition, but also offer her financial independence as well:

> What impressed me most was the fact that a girl could work in an office or a store, yet that wouldn't keep her from being invited to the nicest homes or marrying one of the nicest boys. This freedom to work seemed to me a wonderful thing. I wanted to do something useful myself, as I felt keenly my dependence on my stepfather. (8)

This realization that the frontier offered women an expanded female role convinced Alderson that "a new country offered greater personal liberty than an old and settled one" (109).

Despite claims by some historians that "the great majority of . . . women did not want to make the trip in the first place," many young women like Hopkins and Alderson made a conscious and deliberate choice to move to the frontier (Schlissel 6). They were not "reluctant pioneers" (Armitage 69). Women who were dissatisfied with the constricted lives and confined roles forced upon them by True Womanhood came West--often against their families' wishes--in search of freedom and a meaningful existence. For example, Alderson, the stepdaughter of a wealthy plantation owner in West Virginia, was never completely comfortable with the strict formality that governed a southern belle. Her experiences on the Kansas frontier as a young girl later prompted her to marry a Montana rancher and escape the genteel, but circumscribed, life she had known in the South. Monica Hopkins similarly rejected the prescribed role offered to her as the daughter of a Wesleyan minister, a role she felt unsuited to.

> The new life that I had taken on so cheerfully was so entirely different from anything I had ever experienced before. As you know I had lived the normal life of a minister's daughter, not by any means a model minister's daughter I regret to say. (89)

But, she writes in her letters, she had "quite a struggle" getting to Canada (4). Only after two years of "continuous heart rending sighs, sad looks and deep melancholy" on her part would her father give her permission to marry an Alberta rancher and leave England (4). Even then her family failed to comprehend her enthusiasm for her new life, prompting Hopkins to remark: "I do wish they would realize that I am utterly happy and would not exchange this gloriously free life for any dull uninteresting existence at home" (83). For young women like Monica Hopkins who rejected the confined world of a True Woman, the frontier offered a attractive alternative.

Many young women took up westering simply because they were ambitious and wanted to do something with their lives. Grace Snyder, for instance, recalls as a young woman trying to decide on how she would support herself if she were not to marry.

> For a long time I had been worrying about what I was going to do with my life. Most of the girls I knew, unless they married early, went into other people's kitchens as hired girls, or became clerks or schoolteachers. A hired girl's job, at a $1.50 or $2.00 a week, was the last thing _I_ wanted, and I didn't think I'd care for clerking. But teaching, now--some of the nicest people I had ever known . . . were schoolteachers. (262)

Mollie Dorsey Sanford recorded similar concerns in her diary:

> My 19th birthday . . . . I ought to be doing something or making something of myself. There is not much that is flattering in the prospect that looms up before me now . . . . Father's burdens are increasing. He needs help, and I shall not mope down here always. By spring I hope something will "turn up" to give me an opportunity to satisfy my ambition. (61)

Despite the cult of True Womanhood, young women did not automatically assume that they would get married, and did feel the need to accomplish something with their lives. But even when they did in fact marry, they did not always abandon their ambition. Indeed, their marriages often made it possible for them to participate in an "historic event:" the settlement of the West (Myres xix). As the historian Sandra Myres explains, most westering "men and women . . . believed that they had stepped, however briefly, onto the public stage of great events" (xix). The West gave young women such as Grace Snyder and Mollie Dorsey Sanford a place to channel their energy and their ambition. Snyder, after teaching for a few years, eventually married and with her husband built up a prosperous cattle ranch in Nebraska. Mollie Dorsey Sanford also married, convincing her husband shortly after their marriage to head for Colorado to homestead and mine for gold when she caught "Pikes Peak fever" (115).

Other women satisfied their ambition by homesteading on their own. "Recent research has recovered an interesting figure: that of the single woman homesteader" (Armitage 69). Single women or widows who were the sole providers of their families could file a claim on a homestead.[3] Although the numbers of women homesteading alone varied from place to place, they were sometimes surprisingly high. Sheryll and Gene Patterson-Black, for example, have discovered that "an average of 11.9% of the sample of homestead entrants" in Wyoming and Colorado between 1887 and 1908 were women (16). One of these woman homesteaders was Elinore Pruitt Stewart. Widowed and left with a two year old child to support when her husband was killed in a railroad accident, she first worked in the furnace room of a Denver hospital. With the encouragement of a compassionate minister, however, she soon decided to give homesteading a try. In order to finance this venture, she became a housekeeper for a Wyoming rancher. She later married this man but steadfastly refused to accept any help from him where her homestead was concerned; it was important to Stewart to prove to herself not only that she could do it, but that a lot of women were capable of doing it. Indeed, she saw homesteading as the solution to the plight of working-class single women who were often overworked and underpaid on the frontier. She explained why in a letter to a former employer:

> When I read of the hard times among the Denver poor, I feel like urging them every one to get out and file on land. I am very enthusiastic about women homesteading. It really requires less strength and labor to raise plenty to satisfy a large family than it does to go out to wash, with the added satisfaction of knowing that their job will not be lost to them if they care to keep it. . . . Any woman strong enough to go out by the day could have done every bit of the work . . . . and it would have been so much more pleasant than to work so hard in the city and then be on starvation rations in the winter.
>
> To me, homesteading is the solution of all poverty's problems . . . . any woman who can stand her own company, can see the beauty of a sunset, loves growing things, and is willing to put in as much time at careful labor as she does over the washtub, will certainly succeed; will have independence, plenty to eat all the time, and a home of her own in the end. (214-15)

There were still other reasons why a young woman might come to the frontier. British gentlewomen, for instance, came to Western Canada because their own country had nothing to offer them. At the precise time when Canada's western frontier was suffering from a shortage of women, Britain, as the result of "war," "emigrations" and "differing mortality rates," was seriously overpopulated with women (Jackel xiv-xv). The solution to the countries' mutual problems seemed to be to have Britain's surplus women emigrate to Canada. To some British women, this seemed a better fate than the one they were facing at home, for most of them, "by virtue of their genteel upbringing," were faced with a life of poverty (xiii). British gentlewomen did not work but instead married well and were supported by their husbands. If they did not marry, they could not work for a living and maintain their social standing. As a result, thousands of young gentlewomen, in search of economic security, abandoned their "national and class connections" (xxi) and emigrated to Canada in the "early years of [the] century" (xiv).

Contrary to what Lillian Schlissel argues, westering came at the right moment in young women's lives. She contends that while the move to the frontier satisfied certain drives and ambitions in young men, it contained no place in the life cycle of young women. She writes:

> The westward move for many men was the physical expression of a break with the past and a setting out for a new life. The journey occurred when the rhythms of maturity were primed for a change. The determination to go West was either the initial separation from a man's parental family or the second major move, the move "upward" in the search for economic mobility and success. The adventure took on the color of some "dramatic rite of passage to mastery and adulthood" in the life cycle of the frontier men.
>
> But the journey could have no natural place in the life cycle of the women. (106)

Yet young women too were growing into adulthood, outgrowing their families and looking for challenges as well as a sense of purpose. If they did not satisfy these longings by embarking on the frontier on their own, they certainly did so with their husbands. As Eliane Silverman writes, "women were sometimes drawn west by the urge for adventure, just as many men were. That desire in men is well documented, among women far less so" (5).

But while the frontier offered freedom and opportunity, it also had its limitations. Women homesteaded alone or with their husbands because there was little else they could do. They "saw pioneering as an attractive economic alternative to their then very limited choices of career--schoolteaching, domestic work, or factory work" (Armitage 69). Indeed, Mollie Dorsey Sanford, prior to her marriage, lamented the lack of opportunities available to her:

> I was surprised the other day to see the verses I wrote for Mrs. Preston in the weekly paper. She had sent them up, and had them published, to preserve them for herself, she says. The Editor is a mutual friend, and has solicited contributions, but mercy! I never dreamed of having that jingle published. Mr. Harvey says I have the talent, and not to "bury it under a bushel," but I am sure I shall never pose as an author or writer. But I do often wish that I might be something more than a mere machine. There is something dull in sitting here day by day, planning this garment and making that, but it seems to be my destiny just now. There does not seem to be much that a girl can do here. (98)

Moreover, homesteading was not so exciting, not quite the same adventure, not the same escape from traditional roles, once a woman had children. "Buoyant spirits are almost always in the diaries of unmarried girls and young wives. Accounts shade and darken in the pages of women whose energies were spent nursing and caring for infants and small children" (Schlissel 115). During the first year on the frontier, young women viewed their new life as a holiday or a game, an adventure. It all seemed exotic and they were busy learning new things. By the second year, however, reality began to set in. By this time they usually had a young baby and were expected to do their chores without assistance. This is when homesickness and depression struck, and the real period of adjustment began. In the case of Nannie Alderson, a visit by two young girls to their ranch drove home to her what her life was really going to be like:

> In its small way the two girls' visit was a turning point for me. It was not until then that I began to grow up--always a painful process. Only a year before, _I_ had been the one who went riding--and I loved to ride; I had been the center of attention; I had been free to have a good time. Now it was others who had the fun, while I had only the hard work. And I didn't like it one bit. (126)

Frontier women could also find their freedom constricted by their marriages. If homesteading was what the family was committed to, there was little room for a woman to have a separate life of her own. Monica Hopkins would write: "I realize that this is essentially a man's country and that a woman has practically to sink her own identity and take on her husband's interests" (89-90). The husband's interests generally concerned the homesteading venture, and the interests of the farm or ranch prevailed over all else, as Susan Allison discovered. For a time her family had maintained two ranches in British Columbia, one in the Similkameen Valley and one at Vernon. But when her husband ran into financial difficulties, they were forced to give up one. Allison had grown fond of what she called her "perfectly ideal life" on their ranch in Vernon and hated to give it up, but she had little choice in the matter (47).

> Our losses had been so heavy that my husband came to the conclusion that he could not afford to keep up two places and sold the place to an old cow puncher, John Phillips. I begged him to keep our little home and argued the long, long winters at the Similkameen and the scarcity of winter feed, but his mind was made up and that was that. (54-55)

Indeed, despite the freedom from social conventions offered by the frontier and women's regained economic role within frontier families, traditional notions about what constituted womanhood persisted and there were limits to how much women's gender roles were allowed to change. Women were still expected to observe at least the most basic gender distinctions of the nineteenth century. Nannie Alderson, for instance, recalled the response one particularly progressive young woman received from their hired hands:

> Her friend, Miss S. I will call her, was a very bright young woman but very advanced for our day. She scandalized our boys, who were rather old-fashioned, by borrowing their trousers and riding astride; when the rest of us, if we did have to ride a man's saddle, would simply crook a knee over the saddle horn. Miss S. was very energetic, too, and always wanted to work with them, hauling poles or helping stretch wire. They admired her intellect, but they were rather nonplussed. (125)

The cult of True Womanhood was still pervasive--even on the frontier. True Women remained primarily wives and mothers and there were limits to how and how much a woman could work away from the home. The experience of working-class women in the West provides an interesting case study by which to determine the limits of frontier liberality. It was one thing for a young, single girl to work for a few years before she got married. It was quite another thing for a widowed or divorced woman--especially a divorced woman--to work out. "There was still a sense, even among women, that working was not quite nice" (Silverman 106), for "the common assumption of the era" was "that working women had loose morals" (Lecompte 10). As the editor of her diary points out, it was probably this assumption which led to Emily French's being called an "adventuress" by her employer. Unfortunately, this assumption that working women were sexually loose had some basis in reality. Working women were often forced "by low wages to become prostitutes" (10).[4] Anne Ellis was aware of the public's attitude toward working women. Abandoned by her father as a young child, along with her baby brother and illiterate mother, she had grown up in Colorado's mining towns during the 1880's and '90's. Although her mother later remarried, they remained poor. By her early twenties she found herself twice widowed and left with two young children to raise. To support her family she took in sewing and cooked for mining camps as well as for a telephone construction gang. It was while working for the telephone construction gang (a job in which she was the only woman amongst a group of men who worked in the mountains for long periods of time) that she most forcefully realized that "decent" women did not want to associate with her. She describes how on one occasion she had gone into town with the construction gang for supplies, eager for female company after weeks of entirely male companionship. She was to be disappointed. She writes: "Some women came in. I glanced eagerly up and smiled. I was hungry for the sight of a woman and woman's clothes. They turned coldly away. I was crushed, and I burned with embarrassment" (Plain Anne 84). While many middle-class women who had come to the frontier mocked the business of being ladies, that was a luxury working-class women could not afford. While Monica Hopkins could titter, "we will forget for a day or two that there is such a thing as cooking and housework and be real L-a-d-i-e-s," working women desperately wanted the respect and acceptance others took for granted (109).

Still, despite its limitations, the frontier offered women greater freedom than they had known before. At the very least, because of their isolation, they were spared the constant scrutiny of a judgmental community. Independent working women might sometimes wistfully think that the pampered life of a True Woman was not so bad, but they would also, in the next breath, declare that they were capable of looking after themselves. Emily French, for example, wrote in her diary: "How I wish I had some one to get for me, no, I can earn for myself" (91). Better to be single than badly married, she contended: "32 years ago today I eloped with the demon French. I am a free if not a happy woman once more" (40). That was the trade-off: hard work in exchange for freedom and independence and their own self-respect. Anne Ellis was aware of this when she wrote:

> Many people, after reading 'The Life of an Ordinary Woman,' feel sorry for me. I wish they wouldn't. I am really the happiest person I've ever met. I've had a full, rich life which I'd not exchange for a safer, more stupid one. (Plain Anne 64).

To a certain extent, married women made the same trade-off. They too worked hard and suffered from privations. "It's work, work, until I feel as if I had only a body and the soul is gone," wrote Hilda Rose (28). But they also viewed the challenges and hardships encountered on the frontier as learning experiences. Susan Allison, for instance, would declare in her memoir that their log home's burning down in the dead of winter while her husband was away was a "great experience." "I learned the real value of things by it," she said (63). Hilda Rose concurred that the hardships she had endured on the frontier had improved her as a person: "I am so backwoodsy now, but imagine the pleasures in store when I go back to civilization, as I hope to some day. A better, wiser, stronger woman than when I left it" (6). Nannie Alderson, like Anne Ellis, also wished to make it clear that she was not one to be pitied: "I don't want to be misunderstood; I wouldn't have exchanged my lot for that of any other woman on earth" (190).

In time, the definition of True Womanhood expanded to keep up with the changes in women's role happening on the frontier. Popular literature propagated the image of a Frontier Heroine. The Frontier Heroine was really an extension of the true domestic woman. While she could heroically perform male activities when necessary, she did so mainly to fulfill her role as a wife and mother who was protecting and providing for her family:

> The sturdy helpmate could fight Indians, kill the bear in the barn, make two pots of lye soap, and do a week's wash before dinnertime and still have the cabin neat, the children clean, and a good meal on the table when her husband came in from the fields--all without a word of complaint or even a hint of an ache or a pain. She was the Madonna of the Prairies, the Brave Pioneer Mother, the Gentle Tamer so familiar in Western literature. (Myres 3)

This definition of womanhood, like the one which had preceded it, was an ideal, an impossible ideal, even for those women who welcomed the challenges of the frontier.

When frontier women measured their courage against that of the Frontier Heroine who met every calamity with heroic fortitude, they often came up short. Sarah Ellen Roberts, for example, reluctantly described herself as "something of a coward" (33):

> I am sure that there are many heroic women who would have thought that an experience that was testing me to the breaking point was a light thing, and all I can say for myself when things reached this juncture is that my nerves just got the better of me. (254-55)

Some women _seemed_ to reflect the ideal, but the ideal did not reflect the experiences of real women. In her memoirs, Susan Allison confided: "I . . . learned that even if you are terrified it is best not to show it, then you get the credit for being fearless--I certainly was not" (40).

Anne Ellis was aware that women were given two ways of coping with the difficulties posed by the frontier. They could react as the traditional True Woman, or as the newer Frontier Heroine. When her young nephew fell down a well, she discovered that both were unrealistic. When it was all over and the child had been saved from drowning, she meditated:

> All my life I had wanted and planned to be a heroine. . . . Now, when the time had come, I wasn't at all acting heroinish. Either I should have fainted or sweetly smiled as though this were all in the day's work, and walked nonchalantly back to the sewing-machine. Instead, I was trembling dreadfully. My knees had given way and I crouched on the floor, sobbing, and screamingly scolding Neita. (_Plain Anne_ 2)

Ellis discovered that there was a large discrepancy between the way she was expected to behave as a woman and the manner in which she actually did behave. The result was that she and frontier women like her suffered from a double consciousness of themselves. As Susan Friedman explains: "Not recognizing themselves in the reflections of cultural representation, women develop a dual consciousness--the self as culturally defined and the self as different from cultural prescription" (39). They are conscious of being "at the same time inside and outside the ideology of gender, . . . conscious of that twofold pull, of that division, that doubled vision" (de Lauretis 10).

This "doubled vision" with which frontier women perceived themselves had a great deal to do with how women were constructed as gendered subjects. As Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck point out, a woman's "selfhood" is always "mediated" (1). To a certain extent, a woman's sense of herself as a woman is determined by the cultural representations of women offered to her by her society. As Sheila Rowbotham explains, the "prevailing social order stands as a great and resplendent hall of mirrors. It owns and occupies the world as it is and the world as it is seen and heard" (27). The images of women put forth by society in pictures, stories and sermons claim to reflect actual women and give authority to a particular definition of womanhood. Women, to some degree, accept, reflect and identify with these images. Frontier women, for example, recognized themselves, to some extent, in the images of the True Woman and the Frontier Heroine. But a woman's sense of herself is not entirely determined by cultural representations. It is also made up of her own personal experiences of herself as a woman. This knowledge of herself can contradict the representations offered by the "dominant models in the surrounding culture" (Eakin 207). Thus, as Teresa de Lauretis explains, "gender . . . is not only the effect of representation but also its excess, what remains outside discourse as a potential trauma which can rupture or destabilize, if not contained, any representation" (3).

The problem for frontier women, however, was that while the ideal female self, the True Woman, was seen everywhere and easily recognized and represented, that part of themselves which did not exemplify prescribed definitions of womanhood was represented nowhere, for reasons Teresa de Lauretis has analyzed:

> The discrepancy, the tension, and the constant slippage between Woman as representation, as the object and the very condition of representation, and, on the other hand, women as historical beings, subjects of "real relations," are motivated and sustained by a logical contradiction in our culture and irreconcilable one: women are both inside and outside gender, at once within and without representation. (10)

Without such representation, however, most frontier women could not view that part of themselves which was in excess of cultural representations as real and valid. Their unrepresented selves (e.g. the fearful heroine, the working and respectable woman, the woman savoring independence from the social rites of True Womanhood) lacked a sense of presence. Indeed, when they looked into cultural mirrors, frontier women found that their unrepresented selves simply did not exist. This was not an unusual occurrence in women's history. Carolyn Heilbrun "finds a record of women's struggles to believe in the authority of their own experience" (Schenck 289). Frontier women found that one way in which to give authority to their own experience and a sense of presence to their "selves in hiding" was to create their own representations of themselves in their life-writings which both adopted and contradicted the prevalent cultural representations of women (Heilbrun 14).

CHAPTER TWO - THE MOMENT OF WRITING

The inherent weakness of culturally constructed definitions of the True Woman was that they were so narrow, they failed to account for the wide range of actual women's experiences. This was particularly true on the frontier, where women often had no choice but to transgress cultural gender constructions and participate in activities outside the feminine sphere. Life-writing, however, allowed many frontier women to construct an image of themselves which, while it retained elements of the cultural constructions of womanhood, also reflected, they felt, their particular experiences. If their culture bombarded them with essays, stories, novels and sermons that contained images of the ideal woman to which they responded and which they contradicted in their life-writing, they could also create images of their unrepresented selves in their own writing. They could write what had previously been unwritten about themselves, and in doing so, give presence to absence. They could construct their own mirror image which would reflect back the woman they knew themselves as, not the ideal image of Woman they often felt estranged from. For them, writing the self was an act of agency, a means of "[shattering] the portrait of [themselves they saw] hanging" in the cultural hall of mirrors (Smith 59), and "at the same time, [projecting their] own image onto history" (Rowbotham 27). This image of themselves that frontier women constructed on the page made them more fully "visible to [themselves]" and provided them with proof of their existence outside cultural representations of womanhood (27). This was Agnes Morley Cleaveland's motivation for writing her memoir No Life for a Lady. In trying to "span the gap between" the respectable "lady" she had become and the carefree girl she had been, Cleaveland felt the need to give authority to the latter, the part of herself which ignored conventions of True Womanhood and not the part which conformed to them (356). She writes, "I began to want to put into some semblance of permanent form the story of the girl who had vanished, and her life, the life that was not for what the world calls a lady" (356).

Frontier women, in their attempt to write their unrepresented selves, undertook various kinds of life-writing: diaries, letters and memoirs. Depending on the form of life-writing they chose, one of two narrative constructions were employed: immediate or retrospective. Diaries and letters, for instance, were written from a immediate point of view, focusing on and recording what the woman was doing, thinking and feeling at a particular moment. Memoirs, on the other hand, were written from a retrospective point of view, the author writing and reflecting on something which had happened in the past.[5] Despite these differences, both the immediate and the retrospective narrative constructions had the same purpose: to document the self-in-process of the writer as she attempted to constitute an authentic female subject in writing.

The need to construct an autonomous female subject is clear in the life-writings of those who came to the frontier as young women. Born and raised in conventional communities, they were both aware that they were expected to emulate the image of the True Woman and conscious of their inability to live up to such an idealized figure. Monica Hopkins, the daughter of an English Wesleyan minister, for instance, was expected to follow the strictures of True Womanhood particularly closely, but wrote that she was "not by any means a model minister's daughter" (89). Nannie Alderson similarly felt that she failed to live up to expectations. Her mother, she explains, was the epitome of southern femininity, a "southern lady of the floweriest tradition" (7). Alderson, on the other hand, was not. As she writes in her memoir, A Bride Goes West:

> My mother was a very pretty woman, fond of dress and society, and I was always a disappointment to her because I was neither. Not that I was bad looking--but my stepsister Betty was the pretty one, and mother liked to hear people say, as they often did, that Betty looked more like her than her own child. (7)

Many young women, like Alderson and Hopkins, decided that if they could not succeed as True Women, they would simply define themselves in other terms. If the True Woman was valued for being passive and decorative, they would define themselves by their ability to do things. Moving

West was but the first step in asserting their identity. Conditions on the frontier allowed them to overstep gender boundaries and prove their worth on the basis of their ability to do the practical things that made homesteads succeed and new communities flourish. Unlike middle-class women in established communities, who often did little more than supervise the work of their household servants and adorn the arms of their husbands, frontier women raised gardens, clothed their family, worked in the field, cared for livestock, ministered to the ill and coped in crises. On the frontier, it was more important for a woman to be capable than ornamental. This was the kind of environment women like Hopkins and Alderson were looking for, one in which they would be judged on the basis of their abilities rather than solely on their sex. Wrote Alderson, "I always thought that people should be judged for their human qualities alone" (109).

To a certain extent, these women rejected True Womanhood and embraced a different set of values, sometimes taking delight in mocking their former roles. Hopkins, for example, after a trip to the local horse races, wrote in a letter: "A minister's daughter going to the races? My dear! how shocking!" (67). To mock a particular value, however, is to imply that one is still influenced partly by that value, that one continues to see oneself partly in those terms. These women may have rejected the ornamental aspects of True Womanhood, but they retained many of its moral aspects. They continued, for instance, to judge their own virtue as well as the virtue of other women according to the standards of True Womanhood, as Anne Ellis so painfully discovered from her reception in town by the local middle-class ladies.

Indeed, for many of the young women who came West, the self they were leaving behind was closer to the ideal of True Womanhood than they imagined. Monica Hopkins was completely unprepared for the life she had taken on. The reality was that she had been provided with virtually none of the skills necessary for survival on the frontier. This was not entirely her fault, for as she states in her letters, she had lived the "normal life of a minister's daughter" (89). She had been raised a true middle-class woman. She did know, nor have to know, how to cook or sew or wash clothes. This ignorance she came to lament in her first few months on the frontier:

> I do wish I had learned a few more housekeeping accomplishments before I came out here. There are so many things that I am absolutely ignorant about, but I did take one lesson in ironing just before I was married. Mother became anxious about my abysmal ignorance in running a house, and made arrangements for me to take a lesson in laundry work. Like me, Mother thought that washing was easy, any-fool-can-do-it attitude, but ironing was another thing. So I went to a school where domestic science was taught and spent three hectic hours learning how to iron and gloss my husband's collars and dress shirt fronts!
>
> I bought a glossing iron and treasured it . . ., only to find that my spouse never wears a collar unless he absolutely has to . . . and as

> far as his dress shirts, they are deep in a trunk with the rest of his evening attire. (21)

Nannie Alderson similarly came to the frontier with rather romantic notions of what life would be like and was little prepared for the real work she would have to do. She writes in her memoir:

> I went with romantic ideas of being a helpmeet to a man in a new country, but I was sadly ill-equipped when it came to carrying them out. Before I left Union a dear old lady had taught me how to make hot rolls, but except for that one accomplishment I knew no more of cooking than I did of Greek. Hot rolls, plus a vague understanding that petticoats ought to be plain, were my whole equipment for conquering the West. (19)

But again, Alderson was unprepared for the frontier through little fault of her own. The education she received as a girl was largely viewed as superfluous and failed to teach her anything which might have practical applications. She writes:

> I went to a seminary where the girls were taught a smattering of music and French and other polite subjects, but not much of any of them, so that when I had to support myself years later, the only thing I knew was to take boarders. I didn't even graduate from the seminary, because when I was fifteen my stepfather decided that Betty and I had reached the stage where we had boys in our heads, and it was a waste of money to pay for any more schooling for us. (6-7)

For women like Alderson and Hopkins, coming to the frontier was as much an escape from the ways in which they did reflect the True Woman as it was from the ways they in which they did not. Moving to the frontier was a means of breaking away from a social system which imprisoned them in uselessness and incompetence.

If the frontier permitted these women to become active and capable, writing allowed them even greater control over their identities. Writing allowed them to portray themselves in a way not represented in cultural images. It gave them the power to define womanhood in another way, to use their experiences to construct a subjectivity which reflected their perception of themselves and to give authority to their version of reality. Monica Hopkins' letters to her family, for instance, reveal her determination to change their image of her as a silly, pampered and slightly irresponsible girl, someone in no way prepared for a rough life on the Canadian prairies. She writes: "They are so sure that I'm not cut out for this kind of life. It's up to me to show them that I am" (2).

The strategies and techniques young frontier women such as Hopkins use to construct a female subject are remarkably similar. Usually, they begin their self-portraits by making a clean slate, talking of beginnings and illustrating an awareness that they are starting afresh, leaving behind one self, one life, and beginning another. When, for example, Mollie Dorsey Sanford began the journey west with her family, she wrote in her diary: "There is something fascinating in the thought of the opening up of a new life, a change so complete as this will be" (3). Once young frontier women announced their psychological break with their old selves, they began the process of drawing a new self-portrait. They constructed a new image of themselves by writing about a series of personal experiences which they deemed to be significant and self-defining. These incidents generally display the women as increasingly intelligent, able and resourceful. Ultimately, through this process of accretion, they end up with a written self which is competent and at ease in her new environment.

Monica Hopkins' letters to a female friend follow this pattern of self-development. One of the first incidents she recounts reveals her realization that she is in a new world and will have to learn new ways of behaving. She tells of travelling across the prairies to see her and her husband's ranch for the first time. Past experience had taught her that ladies protected themselves from the sun with a parasol when they were riding in an open carriage, or, in this case, democrat. She discovers, however, that, on the frontier, that feminine habit, along with many others, was clearly inappropriate. She writes:

> I leaned down and fished up my sunshade . . . . Its pristine glory was already beginning to fade somewhat, but I opened it and held it aloft something after the manner of Grannie when she drove in Hyde Park. Unfortunately, our horses are not quite so well schooled as hers were, for with a startled snort away they went, nearly pulling Billie over the dashboard. I hung on for dear life, still holding the sunshade over my head. I could hear Billie yelling but was far too occupied in keeping myself in the democrat to listen to what he was talking about, until one extra loud roar reached me, "Put that damned umbrella down!" (6)

Hopkins does not dwell on her ineptness, however. Two letters later, she is painting a quite different picture of herself, one which shows her growing into her role as a rancher's wife. She writes of being taken to her first roundup and emphasizes, in her letter to her friend, just how well she fit into the proceedings. Indeed, according to her account, she saves the day.

> I heard shouts of, "Head them off. Don't let them pass you. Head them off!"
>
> Me? It was all I could do to stay on my horse at the best of times. Still, something had to be done for they were coming straight at me so, kicking my horse up, I trotted forward and held up my hand like an English policeman and said "whoa" and they stopped! They gave me one look and darted into the brush where Joe was and he headed them off in the right direction. I was so thrilled that I loped along behind wishing that the family at home could see me racing along a cow path, down a narrow valley, not the remotest idea of my destination and not a care in the world!
>
> When I finallly [sic] caught up [with] the men they were were corralling the horses. They seemed quite surprised to see me and I honestly think they had forgotten they had brought me out with them. They didn't even give me the credit for stopping the horses but I didn't let them forget it and hope I gave the impression to three men who were helping Billie that it was solely due to me that the horses were corralled at all. (26)

By manipulating this event to portray herself as capable and quick-thinking, Hopkins uses it to modify and control her self-definition. Phrases such as "I didn't let them forget it" and "[I] hope I gave the impression" only emphasize her desire to authorize a particular image of herself.

But Hopkins does not stop here. She continues to mold her character in her letters, relating episodes which she judges to be reflective of her new self. Increasingly, she depicts herself as not just competent, but, indeed, integral to the operation of the ranch. She writes, for instance:

> It's nice being by ourselves--the first time we have actually been alone since we were married and we are enjoying it immensely. I am afraid that I am rather inclined to spend more time that I should outside with Billie, helping him when I can. I find that another pair of hands can be very useful around a corral, not to mention a pair of legs to "run and fetch things." It's a case of "Hold this halter while I tie Buck's feet," or "Can you steady the log while I hang this gate?" I have heated branding irons in a fire while Billie has roped and tied a calf that he is turning out on the range with its mother. . . . So you see I'm quite useful. (127)

In this passage, Hopkins continues to define herself by itemizing, and thus stressing, all the things she can now do. By the end of her first year in Alberta, her construction of her new self is near complete, and she feels confident enough to declare: "I have still much to learn but I can't help feeling a little proud of myself that I have come through the first year of my life here without making any very big mistakes, or making Billie ashamed of me" (89). She concludes, "[I've learned] to stand on my own feet" (89). It is important to note, however, that even while Hopkins is defining herself as a new and competent woman, she continues to see herself as an auxiliary to her husband; that is, she sees herself as his helpmeet. In her own way, she manages to integrate her new role as a frontier woman with her lingering conception of herself as a True Woman.

Nannie Alderson went through a similar process of personal development when she arrived in Montana, and, like Hopkins, writes about the moments she felt defined her character. At first, she describes herself as completely unsuited for her new life, ignorant of how to perform the most basic tasks. Her account of her first encounter with her nearest female neighbour conveys an image of herself as completely inept. Alderson writes: "She eyed me from the top of my Eastern-made riding cap to the pointed toe of my boots, and I felt she was saying to herself: 'This is a little fool, and she shall pay for it'" (37). But, like Hopkins, Alderson alters this early impression of herself, modifying it to reflect a woman who has learned how to live in her new world. She displays her resourcefulness, for instance, when, with visitors rapidly making their way to her door, she uses the soot off the bottom of the kettle to cover the scuffs on her shoes. She explains:

> I had brought no shoe polish, because I never thought of it. We didn't do anything to scuff shoes in the South. But after a few weeks of steady wear on a ranch my black kid buttoned boots were a sight.
>
> One morning shortly before I went to my first roundup, some visitors arrived, among them Mr. Robinson, whose outfit was camped a few miles away, and who had ridden over to pay his respects to me. I saw the group of men ride up to the corral and dismount, and as I hurried to make myself presentable I wondered what to do about my shoes, which were shabby and foxy-red

> at the tips. Suddenly I remembered how as a child I had seen one of black Mammy's boys when getting ready to go the village, turn up a black iron pot and take some of the soot to blacken his shoes. I seized a kettle and a rag and had just gotten the shabby spots covered when the visitors reached the house. I confessed what I had been doing and where I'd obtained my inspiration.
>
> Mr. Robinson said: "Mrs. Alderson, you will get along all right on a cow ranch."
>
> Such praise was music to me, because I was trying so hard, and my only woman neighbour gave me what would now be called an inferiority complex. (43-44)

This is the pivotal scene in Alderson's memoir, and the fact that it shows her proving to herself and to others that she has what it takes to survive on the frontier, says a great deal about how she wished to be seen.

Again and again, when young frontier women write about themselves, they emphasize their capableness, their quick-thinking, and their composure in difficult situations. Mollie Dorsey Sanford repeatedly portrays herself this way in her diary, recounting event after event in which she saves the day. She stresses that, in contrast to her mother who had difficulty adapting to their new life on the Nebraska frontier, she was perfectly equipped to deal with any situation. For example, when unexpected guests arrive at a time when they are low on rations, it is Sanford who takes over and manages to prepare a meal for them:

> Mother, who feels our circumstances more keenly with her proud English spirit, took the babies and fled to her retreat in the woods, where she often goes to gain her equilibrium. I knew our bachelor friends would expect a square meal, so as I'm chief cook anyway, I knew the honors devolved upon me, so put my wits to work accordingly. . . . When all was ready, they

> hunted up Mother, and when she came in she looked surprised enough, but I, [sic] [was] as cool as a cucumber as tho we were accustomed to such a "spread." (37)

On another occasion, when their younger brother is bitten by a rattlesnake, it is again Sanford, according to her account, who comes to the rescue:

> Poor Mother was perfectly prostrated after the fright was over. She sometimes feels wicked to think she is so far away from all help with her family. But it cannot be helped now. I am so thankful that I am endowed with nerve and strength of character to help take care of the family. Of course I suffer from excitement as much as any of the rest, but I seem to always know what to do, and have the nerve to do it. (49-50)

Sanford, like other young frontier women, used her experiences as a context in which to carefully construct an image of herself in writing. Invariably, this image reflects a strong female self.

Once young frontier women reached the point at which their self-portrait as competent individuals was complete, they often describe themselves in terms of before and after, commenting on how they have changed for the better as women. Monica Hopkins, for example, writes: "I can't help smiling when I look back and think how absolutely 'green' I was" (89). Sometimes, as in the case of Nannie Alderson, they look back on their old, inexperienced selves with more contempt than amusement, however. Alderson remarks:

> Back home in West Virginia I had thought myself quite a housewife. Mother was ill a great deal and I carried the keys, feeling very proud as I

> went about with her key basket, unlocking closets and giving things out. But out here I found that I didn't know, as they say, straight up. . . . My clothes were so inappropriate, they were ridiculous, though I never thought so at the time. . . . They all had trains . . . . I did pin up my skirts to work in, and I wore aprons, but still, nothing more glaringly impractical can be imagined. (39-42)

In aspiring to depict themselves as adept individuals, young frontier women were, to a certain extent, appealing to the image of the Frontier Heroine propagated by the popular literature of the day. The Frontier Heroine must surely have been an attractive and empowering figure, for, unlike the traditional True Woman who was defined primarily by her passivity, she was characterized by her courage, determination and self-sufficiency in a way which did not compromise her respectability (Myres 2-3).[6] The stereotype of the Frontier Heroine provided young women with a model for writing about themselves in a positive and assertive manner. Mollie Dorsey Sanford, for example, was clearly influenced by the sentimental fiction which portrayed this figure. Her journal entries are full of the melodrama, pious moral sentiment and elevated, flowering language which were stock components of sentimental novels (Springer xi). Indeed, she goes so far as to declare her determination to be a heroine in her early entries.

> I shall never forget the looks of dismay, when our new home was pointed out to the family. . . . Father tried to look cheerful, but I could see the tears in Mother's eyes, and I, well, I have started out to be a heroine, a brave, brave girl, and I said "it would be jolly." (13)

Sentimental fiction provided Sanford with not only a feminine model for her ambitious nature, but also with a language and context with which to describe herself in a boastful, yet positive, light.

Like the image of the True Woman, however, the stereotype of the Frontier Heroine was also an illusory ideal, far from the gritty reality of real women's lives. The dangers and privations of the frontier were much more harrowing in reality than in fiction, and it was much more difficult for a woman to be brave in real situations than in her imagination, as Sanford discovered. When she and her husband emigrated to Colorado, she wrote: "I fear I shall sink under this burden. It is not what my fancy painted it" (137). And later, while separated from her husband who has gone to look for work, she encounters one of the more serious dangers of the frontier, and subsequently drops any claims to being a fearless heroine:

> Two men came to the door and pretended to want to rent the house, as there was a sign "To Rent," and I, the only agent, I asked them in, and innocently mentioned about my husband being gone. In the evening one of them came back, and not until then did I realize that I had been indiscreet. He started to come in, without invitation, with a greeting that almost paralyzed me. I screamed to Mr. Van Tell across the street, raised the broomstick that I was using to bring down on his worthless head, when he turned and fled. It all came over me how unprotected I was, so far from home and friends, and with perhaps too little knowledge of the world. I threw myself upon the floor and cried and cried until I was sick. (136)

Similarly, the mood and tone of Monica Hopkins' letters change after her husband suffers a fall from his horse that results in a serious concussion. Where before she was jaunty and dauntless, she is now entirely sober.

> On Saturday Billie and I will celebrate our second anniversary and I shall do it with a very thankful heart. Thankful that I still have him with me and that I am not preparing to return home a widow. . . . I didn't sleep a wink; every few minutes I would touch him to see if he was still breathing. And between times I was making plans for us to return to England at once!
>
> I hope never again to put in such a long, lonely night. I felt deserted by everyone. I was up early and ran down to feed the chickens. I was afraid to leave Billie very long for I didn't know how he would be when he woke up. . . . I haven't told the family at home all the details. I just said that Billie had had a nasty fall from his horse and let them think that Harry was with us all the time. (129-31)

What young frontier women learned was that they fell somewhere in between the two extremes of femaleness, the one utterly helpless, the other completely competent. If the True Woman was not who they wanted to be, was not representative of actual women, neither was the Frontier Heroine. Both stereotypes failed to account for the full range of their experiences.

The female subjects young frontier women constructed in their diaries, letters and memoirs were both more and less than their culture's representations of Woman. They were courageous and competent, but also, at times, vulnerable and insecure, reflecting the complex, and sometimes contradictory, nature of actual women's selves. These subjects were the result of a process of negotiation in which young frontier women wrote against the image of the True Woman and tried to use the image of the Frontier Heroine only to find that it did not exactly fit their reality. In the end, they used their writing as a means of mediating between cultural expectations and their own personal experience.

The young, genteel, middle-class women who came West were not the only group of women to settle the frontier, but they were, despite their attempts to escape from prescribed roles, the most conventional. Although they expanded their female roles and did work outside of the home, they were still primarily wives and mothers. Indeed, Mollie Dorsey Sanford's journal entries, along with her search for a sense of purpose, stop when she becomes a mother. She closes her journal with the following passage:

> With my two little ones, I will have less time to journalize. I hope to spend it in caring for them in helpless infancy, training their young minds through childhood, on up through life, should they be spared to me. I pray for grace, patience, and judgement, and for long and useful lives for us all. I shall keep this book as a reminder of the past, and a help for the future. (193)

There were other women, however, who not only expanded their female roles, but took on male roles as well. Hilda Rose, for example, became the head of her household when her elderly husband was no longer capable of looking after the family. Originally a school teacher in the East, she had come West when she contracted tuberculosis. Later, she married a Montana man twenty years her senior and had one son. Her letters begin at time when her husband is in his seventies and very feeble, her son is only ten, and she, despite her frail health (she weights only 86 pounds), is left to support the family at a time when Montana was in the grip of an extended drought. She explains the lengths she must go to to ensure that her family will survive through the winter:

> It will be soon be time to put in garden now. I plant about an acre altogether of garden stuff and potatoes. It's all I can take care of myself, but Boy is getting big enough to help me now and I have rented an acre of irrigated land on the prairie--very rich land which I will put into mangels and beets for the cow. I get two thirds of the crop, but I have to weed and water it. I see I have to have something besides straw for the cow, in order to make milk. Sometimes Daddy is able to work, and sometimes not; so I have learned to go ahead, and if Daddy feels able to help I'm very thankful, but I never count on it. (45)

Rose's husband, unable to perform his role as head of the family, abdicated it to her. She writes: "Daddy said the other day that he'd quit worrying, and that's because I never bother him any more about it. I go ahead and plan and do things and seldom tell him until afterwards" (73). Eventually, when it became impossible for Rose to continue providing for her family in Montana, she and her husband decided to homestead in northern Alberta. They settled in Fort Vermilion and there too she was almost entirely responsible for supporting the family and meeting the homestead requirements.

It is interesting how Rose, a woman performing a man's role, portrays herself. She identifies with and describes herself in terms of a very male figure: Robinson Crusoe. When she first arrives in Fort Vermilion and lays eyes on their new land, she writes: "I felt like Robinson Crusoe as I stood on the shore of this mighty river and looked at the swamp that edged it, so dense and luxuriant that I had never seen anything like it" (89). She observes the similarities in their situations, separated from the rest of the world and forced to find a way to take advantage of the bounty of the land around them. Quoting from an unidentified source, she writes: "'I'll be out of humanity's reach, I must finish my journey alone'" (81). Also like Robinson Crusoe, she declares her sovereignty over all the uninhabited land around her, again quoting an unidentified source (possibly a paraphrase of certain passages in the novel):

> As I look at the river on three sides, where there will never be a sign of human habitation in sight,
> I am monarch of all I survey . . .
> From the centre all round to the sea. (98)

Rose, performing the male role in her family, describes herself in traditionally male terms. Rather than defining herself in terms of her relationships with her husband and son, as would a True Woman, she portrays herself as a solitary figure, responsible for, and in charge of, the destiny of those around her.

Elinore Pruitt Stewart, like Hilda Rose, was forced to become the head of her family when her husband was killed in a railroad accident. Left with a two-year-old daughter to support, she decided to homestead on her own. She was better prepared than most women to take on such a challenge. She and her siblings had been orphaned at an early age, and so she had learned how to do a great deal of the work on their farm in Oklahoma. She writes: "We had no money to hire men to do our work, so had to learn to do it ourselves. Consequently I learned to do many things which girls more fortunately situated don't even know have to be done" (16). Even when she later remarried, she remained independent and self-supporting.

> I should not have married if Clyde had not promised I should meet all my land difficulties unaided. I wanted the fun and the experience. For that reason I want to earn every cent that goes into my own land and improvements myself. Sometimes I almost have a brain-storm wondering how I am going to do it, but I know I shall succeed; other women have succeeded. (134)

Stewart, like Rose, describes herself throughout her letters in very masculine terms. For instance, she writes about the time after her first husband's death in a surprisingly positive light, more as an opportunity than a worry. She made plans for herself, big plans:

> I had not thought I should ever marry again. Jerrine [her daughter] was always such a dear little pal, and I wanted to just knock about foot-loose and free to see life as a gypsy sees it. I had planned to see the Cliff-Dwellers' home; to live right there until I caught the spirit of the surroundings enough to live over their lives in imagination anyway. I had

> planned to see the old missions and to go to Alaska; to hunt in Canada. I even dreamed of Honolulu. Life stretched out before me one long, happy jaunt. I aimed to see all the world I could, but to travel by unknown bypaths to do it. But first I wanted to try homesteading. (188)

Stewart continually portrays herself as both adventurous and independent, traits not normally associated with women in her time. She recounts, for example, how, after working on her soon-to-be husband's ranch for six months, she became restless and decided to take her daughter on a "camping-out expedition" in the nearby mountains (25). The first couple of days of their trip were pleasant and uneventful. Stewart writes of hunting, fishing, building temporary shelters and pine-needle beds, and enjoying the beauty of her surroundings. By the third day, however, she awoke to find herself in the middle of a snowstorm. She writes how she went from feeling proud of herself, to disgusted and then finally relieved when she managed to make it home without the men having to rescue her:

> I kept thinking how superior I was since I dared to take such an outing when so many poor women down in Denver were bent on making their twenty cents per hour in order that they could spare a quarter to go to the "show." I went to sleep with a powerfully self-satisfied feeling, but I awoke to realize that pride goeth before a fall. . . . as it was only five o'clock, I went back to bed. And then I began to think how many kinds of an idiot I was. Here I was thirty or forty miles from home, in the mountains where no one goes in the winter and where I knew the snow got to be ten or fifteen feet deep. . . . I determined to rig up "Jeems" and turn him loose, for I knew he would go home and that he would leave a trail so that I could be found. I hated to do so, for I knew I should always have to be powerfully humble afterwards. . . . I got home

> at twelve and found, to my joy, that none of the men had returned, so I am safe from their superiority for a while, at least. (32-44)

Stewart was aware of how women were defined in her culture. She knew that they were deemed inferior to men and that a True Woman would have never embarked on such a trip alone. But this is clearly not how she saw herself. She saw herself as men were seen, as capable and independent, and had no intention of providing anyone with proof of her "female inferiority."

Indeed, Stewart was proud of her abilities, her accomplishments, her self-sufficiency; all traits that would have normally been associated with men. In one letter, for instance, she tallies the total yield from her agricultural pursuits in one year:

> Jerrine and I have put in our cellar full, and this is what we have: one large bin of potatoes (more than two tons), half a ton of carrots, a large bin of beets, one of turnips, one of onions, one of parsnips, and on the other side of the cellar we have more than one hundred heads of cabbage. . . . I milked ten cows twice a day all summer; have sold enough butter to pay for a year's supply of flour and gasoline. . . . I have raised enough chickens to completely renew my flock, and all we wanted to eat, and have some fryers to go into the winter with. I have enough turkeys for all of our birthdays and holidays. (280-81)

Like Hilda Rose, Stewart defined herself not so much by her traditional roles as a wife and mother, but by her work. Her identity was not a derivative of her husband's. She was a person in her own right, as she indicated by her frequent use of the personal pronoun "I" in the above quotation. Similarly, she was not an object to be possessed by her husband, as was the True Woman. Instead, she stresses that she was the possessor of things. She refers to herself as a "bloated landowner" (7) and often uses the possessive pronouns "my" and "mine:" "my place" (7), "my house" (77), "my land" (77). In many ways, Stewart wrote about herself as would have a man.

For women like Elinore Pruitt Stewart and Hilda Rose, who took on male roles and activities, cultural definitions of True Womanhood simply did not apply to their reality. It is not surprising then that their constructions of themselves as female subjects do not reflect these stereotypes, that, instead, they resemble what would have been considered male constructions of self. The inherent problem with this strategy of presentation, however, was that these women were in danger of defining themselves not as women, but as men. Such an attempt must surely have been taboo at a time when the separation of male and female spheres was so clearly demarcated. Even the Frontier Heroine was essentially a wife and mother, an extension of the True Woman. The inviolable nature of this demarcation of the sexes is suggested by Mollie Dorsey Sanford's mother's reaction when Sanford disguises herself as a man in order to find the family's lost cow. Sanford writes:

> It occurred to me how much easier I could get through the tangled underbrush if I were a man! and without letting anyone know of my project, I slipped out into the back shed, and donned an old suit of Father's clothes, pulled on an old cap over my head and started on my pilgrimage. I was prowling thro the bushes calling, "Co,

> Boss, co, Boss, co" singing the "Farmer Boy," feeling secure that no men folks were around. Coming out from a thicket of underbrush to a clear spot, what was my consternation to emerge into a camp of men, who were quietly seated on the ground eating their breakfasts! I could not scream nor faint as that feminine resource would certainly betray me, but thought "discretion the better part of valor" and that "he who runs away will live to fight another day," and the way I travelled through those woods to the house was a caution. . . . Mother . . . fears I am losing all the dignity I ever possessed. (53)

The crux of the matter, as Sanford herself realized, was that to behave or to present oneself in a partly feminine or masculine way was to imply the whole of one's gender. To dress as a man meant one was a man; to scream and faint as woman meant one was a woman, as Teresa de Lauretis explains:

> If gender representations are social positions which carry differential meanings, then for someone to be represented and to represent oneself as male or as female implies the assumption of the whole of those meaning effects. (5)

Thus, for Elinore Pruitt Stewart and Hilda Rose to represent themselves even in part as male figures was to suggest in some degree that they were male.

In order to counter this assumption, both Stewart and Rose reaffirmed their membership in the female class. Rose pointed out that, while she was performing so-called male activities, she was still a woman, that, although she was the head of her household, she identified with and was like other women. She writes, for instance:

> One of the lonesome sisterhood had a bottle with just a wee bit of cold cream and I had some powder. After such a long day we thought we'd

> better fix up a little, as we felt hot and sunburned. So we went down the bank and washed in the river and then used up the cold cream and powder and felt so much better and real civilized. It does n't [sic] take much to make women happy and contented even if they are on the banks of a lonely river, two thousand miles away. (158-59)

Rose uses words like "sisterhood" to convey her connection with and allegiance to other women as a group. She reinforces this sense of belonging by defining what it is that makes women, in general, happy and then implying that that is what makes her, in particular, happy too. They both wanted to appear attractive and refined. Stewart takes a different approach. She, despite her success at "male" pursuits, denies (somewhat insincerely) having any intention of equating herself with a man. When she is told, for example, that she had "almost as much sense as a 'mon,'" she declares, "that is an honor I never aspired to, even in my wildest dreams" (17).

Frontier women like Stewart and Rose were not trying to define themselves as men. On the contrary, they were attempting to expand their culture's definition of what women could do. Rose, for example, was very proud of herself for finding the means to survive when even young men in her Montana community could not support their families:

> I feel very proud of myself, for many families are leaving because they tell me they'll starve to death if they stay. And they have young husbands to work for them. (69)

Later, when told that "no white women from the outside [could] stand it longer than six years" in northern Alberta, she declared, "I'll have to show them" (150). Similarly, it was Stewart's intention to prove that a woman could homestead. She writes: "I never did like to theorize, and so this year I set out to prove that a woman could ranch if she wanted to" (279). At the end of that year, she proudly announced: "I have tried every kind of work this ranch affords, and I can do any of it" (282).

Stewart and Rose used their writing to negotiate a new kind of female subject. Instead of simply modelling their written selves after existing images of the True Woman, they struggled to modify those images by shaping constructions of themselves which reflected their reality. They portrayed themselves proudly succeeding at heretofore unwomanly tasks while at the same time emphasizing their femaleness. In the process, they expanded their culture's definition of womanhood to include themselves.

Nevertheless, what must be remembered is that women who transgressed gender boundaries had to defend themselves as women, and the more they transgressed gender boundaries, the more they had to defend themselves. Such was the case of working-class frontier women. Nancy Cott has argued that the cult of True Womanhood served to unite "all" women for the first time as a class because it gave them a common vocation: domesticity (Bonds of Womanhood 93-100). Working-class women, however, were by definition excluded from this female class. While middle-class and wealthy families could afford to keep their women in the home (or on the farm), working-class women had to leave their home and families, in a manner similar to men, and enter the marketplace to support themselves. Thus, they were not considered True Women, and other so-called "true" frontier women frequently refused to associate with them (even on the supposedly classless frontier). The result was that instead of feeling a bond with other women, a sense of togetherness, working-class frontier women often record feeling ostracized and terribly alone. Emily French's diary, for instance, is full of comments like "oh how lonely is my life to me," (89) and "how I do wish I could have a . . . companion" (24). Anne Ellis similarly describes herself as "alone and lonely" in her memoirs (Ordinary Woman 65). This "sense of exclusion" was not peculiar to working-class women living on the frontier (Steedman 18). Carolyn Kay Steedman, in her book Landscape for a Good Woman, argues that the feeling "of being cut off from what others enjoy" is a "dominant" feature of working-class women's lives (18). Working-class frontier women desperately wanted to be included with and accepted by middle-class women. Ellis wrote, "I wanted to be like other people" (Plain Anne 37). Emily French similarly revealed her craving for inclusion with comments such as "they always treat me as if I was good enough for an associate" (27), and "she is kind and considerate of my feelings, that is worth a great deal to me" (33).

Working-class frontier women like Ellis and French realized that the True Woman was a middle-class woman and that if they wanted to be included with middle-class women, they had to become, or at least appear be, the image of middle-class True Womanhood. Consequently, part of their construction of themselves as working-class subjects entailed depicting themselves as middle-class True Women. Such "embourgeoisement" is typical of working-class life-writings according to Regenia Gagnier (Textual Practice 46). She writes that it is common for working-class women to adopt a "middle-class gender ideology," to attempt to define themselves as women in middle-class terms (47). One of the most basic ways in which Anne Ellis attempted to do this was to emphasize her chastity. Middle-class women, particularly Victorian middle-class women, were considered to be sexually pure or "passionless."[7] Working-class women on the other hand were commonly thought to be, by definition, sexually loose, mainly due to the fact that many were often forced by low wages into prostitution. Many working-class women were not prostitutes, but given the assumption that they were, Ellis attempted to indicate her class in her memoirs by depicting herself as a sexually pure woman, writing: "I never cheapened myself by having men company" (Plain Anne 17).

Even as a child, Ellis had been determined to define herself as a woman in middle-class terms--she wanted to be a "lady." She practiced being a lady according to the models she knew, and when she learned that one particular lady was so well bred that she made no sign when a wasp stung her, Ellis set out to prove that she too was a lady because she could pass such a test. She writes:

> My heroes were Lincoln, John L. Sullivan, and Frances Folsom Cleveland. We had a lovely picture of her we got with coffee wrappers. She was beautiful and sweet, and my idea of a lady, and when I practiced being a lady I used her for an example. Yes, I practiced. I read somewhere of a woman who, one time at a dinner party, when a wasp flew down her dinner dress, stinging as it went, was so well bred that she smiled and never moved. I thought, 'If that is all it takes,' and caught a yellow jacket--pinching him a little to get him in good working order; then sat down before a flat rock, opened my apron at the neck, and slipped the yellow jacket down inside. He did his stuff, and I stood the test, and smiled at my only guest, a serious-looking dog. (Ordinary Woman 128)

Later, Ellis took great pride in the fact that, although she had worked at manual labour for most of her life, other women thought she had "lady hands" (Plain Anne 247). Ellis realized that she could use her appearance, her hands for instance, to define herself as middle-class and gain access into middle-class circles. This is why clothes were so important to her, just as they have been, historically, for other working-class women. Steedman, in her book on working-class women, writes that "nineteenth-century women and girls tried again and again to indicate the significance of clothes to social investigators who did not understand" that good clothes were a "means of entry" in to the social world (89), that "the cut and fall of a skirt and good leather shoes [could] take you across the river and to the other side" (16). In short, good clothes could help make a working-class woman become a "lady." Ellis knew this and saw to it that she and her children were "always well dressed" although she usually had to make over other people's castoffs (Plain Anne 30). She decided that if she ever came into money the first thing she would buy would be new clothes and at night she often dreamed of precisely how she would spend the money on a new outfit. She writes:

> I wanted clothes. How I wanted clothes! I remember one sleepless night, tired from sewing on other people's clothes, I planned what I should buy, if, by some stroke of fortune, I became possessed of sixty dollars. With this I outfitted myself from head to heel . . . then slept. (Plain Anne 31)

This desire to become middle-class was not limited to herself, however. It also extended to how she raised her family. "It [had] always been a wish and a dream of [hers]," she said, "to found a cultured family" (Plain Anne 39). Thus, she writes that she saw to it that her children were always invited to parties (for "social training") (23), that they always participated in school plays, that they "never went . . . with any one who was not their equal or more" (17), and that "there . . . [was] no difference between the well-to-do man's child and [hers]" (64). In addition, while her neighbours thought she was crazy because it had to be "freighted from Denver on wagons," her piano, which she could barely play, was a "symbol" of all she had hoped to achieve for her family and for herself (10). She was also especially eager for her son to attend college. That too was "a symbol of what [she] hoped [they] might be; that [they] might reach a place where, instead of being job-hunters, [they] could be job-givers" (183). Clearly, it was Ellis's intention to raise her own status in the process of elevating her children to the middle-class, and, when she was invited to a luncheon honouring the Women's League of Equal Rights, she took it as a sign that she had "arrived." She confides: "I was thrilled inside; outside I was trying to act 'to the manner born'" (184). Indeed, she viewed the invitation as something she could use to prove to other middle-class women that she finally belonged, for she writes: "as I ate, I planned how I would bring into future conversations, 'The time I had luncheon with Mrs. O.H.P. Belmont [head of the Women's League of Equal Rights] at the Broadmoor'" (186).

Ellis's construction of herself as a gendered subject illustrates, to a certain extent, how she had "[adopted] middle-class standards" of womanhood in order to be included with other women (Gagnier, Textual Practice 50). But Ellis's construction of herself as a middle-class woman is only one of the narratives in her memoirs. There is another. One in which she shows a "resistance to embourgeoisement" and attempts to write authentically, and with dignity, about her experience as a working-class woman and the ways in which she was clearly not middle-class (Gagnier, Textual Practice 44). She argues with her editor, for instance, when he wants her to rewrite her memoir according to what Regenia Gagnier calls a "middle-class 'plot,'" one in which there is a climax and a resolution (45). He tells her it would have been better had she written her memoir "'in a progressive way, arriving at some point of climax,'" to which Ellis replied, somewhat sarcastically, "Oh, yes, how I would like to have had climaxes--to arrive instead of always going somewhere!" (Plain Anne 261). The fact was, she points out, that she "was writing the story of [her] life, and in spite of [her] wanting it different, wanting development and variation, [she] did not get it" (261). As Gagnier explains, a working-class woman's life was generally not structured by crises and recoveries but instead by a "series of jobs" (Textual Practice 45). This structural difference is obvious when one compares the life-writings of young middle-class frontier women with that of working-class frontier women. The life-writings of young middle-class women are structured according to the crisis-and-recovery model (45). They begin with the subject's ineptness, climax at the moment when the subject achieves competency, and close with an illustration of the subject's new found confidence. Such a structure, Gagnier points out, "presupposes an active and reactive world" (45). The subjects of these narratives take action in order to control their fates. They come west when they are unsatisfied with their lives at home, and then, when they discover they lack the skills necessary for living on the frontier, take control of their situations and learn those skills. Ellis's memoirs and Emily French's diary, on the other hand, are structured primarily by their struggle to survive as they go from one low-paying job to another. Instead of seeing themselves as active participants in their own fates, they portray themselves as the "passive victims of economic determinism," their lives dependent upon forces outside of their control (45). Ellis knew that working-class women like herself, because their lives did not correspond to middle-class plots, were not thought of as heroines in the traditional sense, but it occurred to her that perhaps they were the true heroines, after all--the ones who managed to keep going despite not ever having a climax. She writes:

> I think it is the heroines who do, all their lives, carry on; never arriving, never having climaxes, except birth and death, joy and sorrow, happiness and disappointment. (Plain Anne 261)

This was the story Ellis wanted to tell: what it was like to be a working-class heroine, going from job to job, trying to survive.

Ellis's construction of herself as a working-class frontier woman begins in a letter quoted in the introduction to her first memoir. In it Ellis declares her intention to write truthfully about her life as working woman, and, in the process construct an authentic working-class female subject. Part of that truth, she says, is that a working-class woman is a very "ordinary" woman:

> I will try to write truthfully--why not? Not trying to dress it up or make it better or in any way to change it. You know Herbert Quick said, "The life of the most ordinary man is interesting and priceless. The trouble is no one can write such a life." But I'm going to try it! It will be the life of a very ordinary woman, hundreds just like it all around you, only mine happened to be lived for the most part in the excitements and hardships of mining camps. . . . I have known in my life only the most ordinary people, and always like to read of them, so I can and will write of just such folks as myself. There are so many millions of this kind who never write memories, but believe me, they have thoughts, hopes and aspirations which they cannot express and are never given credit for. (Ordinary Woman xi-xii)

It is not unusual for working-class life-writings to begin with a statement of the writer's "ordinariness," according to Regenia Gagnier. She calls it the "'social atom' phenomenon" (Textual Practice 44). "The authors [are] conscious that to many potential readers they [are] but 'social atoms' making up the undifferentiated 'masses' (44). They are aware that there is an "attribution of sameness" to lives of working-class people (Steedman 11), and they know that (middle-class) autobiography is, conventionally, about the exceptional individual.[8] Thus, the authors feel they must justify themselves to their audience as "worthy of the attention of others" (Gagnier, Textual Practice 44). To a certain extent, working-class women themselves did identify with "undifferentiated masses." They tended to derive their identities from the group in which they lived (their class) and were unaccustomed to thinking of themselves as "individuated '[egos]'" (Gagnier, Subjectivities 141). This is not to say that they do not have rich and complex mental lives. As Steedman points out, there has been a refusal on the part of the middle-class to attribute a "complicated psychology" (12), an "emotional or psycho-sexual existence" (11), to the mental life of working-class people. Gagnier attributes this refusal to "the belief that the especially valuable thing about human beings is their mental capacity and that this capacity is a property of individuals rather than groups" (Textual Practice 41). Ellis, however, emphatically declares that while she might be a "social atom" amongst the "undifferentiated masses," she too has "thoughts, hopes and aspirations" which are worthy of the attention of others. Thus, she not only defined, but justified writing about, herself as a working-class woman.

If it was not unusual for Ellis to begin her memoir with a statement of her ordinariness, what was unusual was that she also began it with a genealogy, a "conventional middle-class [beginning]" not commonly found in working-class life-writings (Gagnier, Textual Practice 44). Ellis had gathered through her reading of other people's memoirs that sketching one's "family lineage" was the "appropriate" way for one to begin such a work (Gagnier, Textual Practice 44). Ellis, however, twists this middle-class convention to reflect her own working-class reality. She traces her family lineage along maternal, rather than paternal, lines, writing: "Of course one starts with ancestors. For years I did not know this. I thought one had only a mother, and I yet think of our mother as the ancestor. And indeed she is the root, stem, and branches of my family tree" (Ordinary Woman 1). Carolyn Steedman contends that this is typical of working-class households in which fathers are often simply not "there very much" (6). Indeed, in Ellis's case, her father had abandoned the family. "He went to Buffalo and never returned," she writes (Ordinary Woman 14). The result of the father's absence, Steedman argues, is that the family remains matriarchal because patriarchal power is never established along the lines suggested by psycho-analytic theory.[9] The further effect is that the girl children in working-class families tend to become different kinds of gendered subjects. They become women who "don't quite believe in male power" (Steedman 19). This was the kind of woman Ellis became, one who would write: "[I] am not afraid of men" (Plain Anne 45). Clearly, the structure of the working-class family, and the kind of woman it produced in Anne Ellis, did not imitate middle-class models of family and womanhood in which patriarchal power ruled.

Ellis's construction of herself as a working-class subject also differs in other ways from middle-class constructions of gender. Whereas middle-class girls spent their childhood pursuing their education and forging friendships with each other, Ellis spent her childhood caring for younger siblings, failing at school and being ostracized by other girls. What hurt most was the ostracism, and it was clearly her poverty which separated her from other children. She recounts in her first memoir an incident in which she, hungry from the lack of decent lunch, retrieved the sandwich another girl had thrown away. Unfortunately, the owner of the sandwich caught her in the act and made "a big fuss" over Ellis's "starving and stealing to eat" (Ordinary Woman 50). The long-term result, she writes, was that:

> Jean Valjean did not suffer much more over his loaf that I did over my slice; no girl ever made a companion of me or put her arms around me, and even now when a woman shows any feeling toward me it embarrasses and thrills me. (50)

It is not just Ellis's childhood that did not correlate to middle-class norms. Neither did her marriage. Gagnier has explained that while the middle-classes tended to form companionate marriages, the working-classes did not (Textual Practice 46). Instead, their marriages were usually "economically orientated" and devoid of romance (46). Such was the case with Ellis who married in order to escape her step-father and poverty after her mother died. Unfortunately Ellis, like other working-class girls, had been raised on middle-class stories of romance and therefore expected her marriage to reflect such literary patterns. She writes: "In all the books I had read, they first told you they loved you, asked you to be their wife, then kissed you, or rode or strode away" (Ordinary Woman 146). Given such expectations, Ellis was bitterly disappointed with her own hastily arranged, loveless marriage. Recalling her wedding, she writes: "It is night, and all stand around a table, and it is done, everything so cheap and common. I am choking inside. Where are all my dreams of romance?" (177). For working-class women, marriage was about the failure of romance (Gagnier, Textual Practice 49).

Besides childhood and marriage, the single most defining feature of womanhood has been, traditionally, motherhood. At the same time, there has been, as Carolyn Steedman points out, a concomitant assumption about the desire to mother in all women. She writes: "Nearly everything that has been written on the subject of mothering . . . assumes the desire to mother" (16). Steedman, however, does not automatically find this desire to mother in the life stories of working-class women. Instead, she contends that it is normal for working-class women to not want to mother. "It is ordinary not to want your children," "to find them" a burden and "a nuisance," she writes (17). This was certainly the case for Anne Ellis, whose attitude toward motherhood was formed as a child watching her own mother have babies. Ellis observed her mother deliver baby after baby despite being in frail health, continually having to work, and never receiving any help or any sympathy. This was all in addition to the fact that there was usually nothing for the newest mouth to eat once it had arrived. When someone sent her mother a bottle of wine as a gift after giving birth to yet another child, Ellis recalls thinking: "this was the only excuse I could see for any one having babies" (Ordinary Woman 48). Consequently, when she was six, she decided that she was going to be a "barn doe." She writes: "I decided that when I was married I was going to be a 'barn doe,' because it was explained to me that they never had little ones; they must have said 'barren doe,' but to me it was 'barn doe'" (49). Despite her best intentions, however, Ellis had her first baby ten months after her wedding. When she soon became pregnant with her second child she confesses she was "very sorry, as things [were] coming so hard" (193). When the local mill caught fire, she explains how she used it as an opportunity to try to abort the pregnancy:

> I am the hardest fire-fighter (not to save the mill, however). I grabbed huge tubs of water and carried them up a steep path from the creek, using every ounce of strength and straining every nerve and muscle in my body each trip. Time and time again I did this, was dripping wet, my hair hanging down, and working in a

> frenzy. Finally I dropped, exhausted, and thought, 'Well, if that don't do it, nothing will.' No one spoke to me. The next day I felt fine, and Rosie said, with a knowing look, 'Had all your work for nothing, didn't you?' (Ordinary Woman 193-94)

It is significant that Ellis's friend Rosie recognized what Ellis was trying to do. It confirms that the desire to not mother was not particular to Ellis but instead a defining feature of the working-class woman.

For Anne Ellis, constructing an authentic working-class subjectivity was a complex process of negotiation between different cultural constructions of womanhood and her experienced reality. She rejected externally imposed images of the working-class woman as sexually loose and psychologically simple as untrue. At the same time, however, in her attempts to belong with other middle-class women she adopted another cultural construction, trying to show how she was like them by portraying herself as the archetype of middle-class True Womanhood. Still, Ellis knew there were ways in which she was irrevocably different from most middle-class women and she attempted to write this difference, constructing a working-class female subject who was defined by her ordinariness, matrilineal descent, alienation from other women, "non-companionate" marriage, and desire to not mother (Gagnier, Textual Practice 46). For Ellis, the point in writing was to prove that she was both similar to and different from other women, that she could simultaneously be both a working-class woman and a True Woman.

For frontier women, writing was a tool with which to mediate between social expectations and lived experience. It allowed them to articulate the ways in which they were both like and unlike cultural images of womanhood, and, in the process, simultaneously to discover and construct a female subject which they felt most accurately reflected their actual selves. Moreover, this process of writing out the self was self-affirming, for the writing on the page provided frontier women with a form of external, tangible proof of their autonomous existence. In short, each frontier woman's life-writing was "evidence of one woman's presence to herself" (Schenck 291).

CHAPTER THREE - THE MOMENT OF BEING READ

Life-writing provided frontier women with a means of self-affirmation. It allowed them to discover and confirm their perceptions of themselves. Selfhood, however, is not just shaped by an individual's perception of herself. It is also shaped by others' perceptions of her. As Stephen Spender explains, a person always sees him or herself from two points of view:

> his life as it appears to himself, from his own position, when he looks out at the world from behind his eye-sockets; and his life as it appears from outside in the minds of others; a view which tends to become in part his own view of himself also, since he is influenced by the opinion of those others. (viii)

Consequently, in order for a person to believe that she exists as she thinks she does, she needs others to recognize her perception of herself as true and valid. Sheila Rowbotham, writing from her own experience with this dilemma, explains how such recognition is necessary to the formation of a self:

> I had a nagging and irreconcilable notion that if I could only get through the mirror a separate self would emerge who would confirm the existence of the first self by recognizing it. Without this recognition I felt invisible inside myself although my appearance was clearly visible in the glass. (27)

Similarly, in the case of frontier women, the selves which they had constructed in their life-writings remained somewhat immaterial without the recognition of others. What frontier women needed was some form of public affirmation of their written selves, the selves which did not always conform or live up to the preconceived notions of womanhood set out by society. They needed some kind of public acknowledgement that the True Woman was not the ideal woman reflected in the images of popular culture but the ordinary woman slogging away in her everyday existence. Only when they had received such acknowledgement could frontier women feel truly "present" to themselves.

Thus, if the first function of frontier women's life-writings was to prove the writer's existence to herself, the second was to communicate that self to others so that they too might recognize it. Under normal circumstances, these women would have done so through their day-to-day conversations with other women. They would have done this in the context of "a newly self-conscious and idealized concept of female friendship" which had developed in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Cott, Bonds of Womanhood 160). This new appreciation of female friendship was partly attributable to the nineteenth-century "pseudo-scientific" practice of "cataloguing" the "differences between the sexes" (161). Men were considered to be "superior in strength and in all of the rational capacities (discernment, judgment, etc.)" while women, it was thought, "surpassed them in sensibility, grace, tenderness, imagination, compliance--the qualities of 'the heart'" (161). This "sex-role division" implied that women could "find truly reciprocal interpersonal relationships only with other women" because "men could not be expected to respond in kind to women's feelings" (168). It was in this context that "'heart'-felt friendship between women became a way of life" and that other women became a woman's most important peer group (185). Consequently, if a frontier woman was going to attempt to communicate her perception of her self to someone, that person was likely to be another woman.

Conditions on the frontier, however, often left women bereft of their sympathetic female audience. To begin with, most frontier women were confronted at some point with extreme physical isolation. Settlement on the frontier was as a rule sparse during the early stages of development and could remain that way for several years. Women could go months, even years, without seeing another white woman, while cultural differences and prejudices made it difficult for them to form friendships with native women. This meant that the only people frontier women were left to converse with were the men in their family circle. Given that men tended to greatly outnumber women in pioneer communities, a frontier woman could often be surrounded by not only her husband but a number of hired hands as well. It was not unusual for these men to be sympathetic to the particular privations a woman faced on the frontier and many attempted to provide what companionship they could. Still, they could not replace a female listener. Decorum dictated that certain subjects were simply not discussed between the sexes. As Nancy Cott explains:

> Women's appreciation of friends of their own sex to whom they could 'freely communicate . . . their feelings . . . ' or 'express their sentiments . . . ' . . . reflected the psychological distance placed between the sexes by sex-role typing. Exaggerated sex-role distinctions may have succeeded in making women uncomfortable with men (and vice versa) as often as rendering the two sexes complementary. (Bonds of Womanhood 190)

There were other reasons as well why women hesitated to confide in their men. "Diaries and journals confirm the sense that troubled women did not confide in their men, either because . . .[they] expected only rough comfort or because women hesitated to add their unhappiness to their husbands' worries" (Armitage 71). Mollie Dorsey Sanford, for instance, confided to her diary: "I am ashamed to be so homesick. Of course I do not say all that I inscribe here. This is my 'confidante.' I try to be cheerful for By's sake, for fear he might think I wasn't happy with him" (145).

Frontier women did not lack female companionship simply because they were geographically isolated, however. They were isolated in other ways and for other reasons as well. Frontier women were less mobile than their men, for instance. Men were usually the ones who went to town or neighbouring farms and ranches on business or to buy supplies while the women were left at home because it was simply too difficult to pack up the children for the often long and uncomfortable journey. Besides, someone had to remain at home to take care of the farm. If a frontier woman did want to pay a visit to a neighbouring woman, she generally had to wait for her husband to take her, and there was rarely time for such social excursions. Consequently, even if there were other women in the surrounding countryside, a frontier woman often did not see them on a regular basis. And, no matter how much a frontier woman might crave the sympathetic ear of one of her own sex, there was no guarantee that she would be compatible with the nearest available woman. Nannie Alderson, for example, found that her nearest neighbour gave her an "inferiority complex" (44). Sometimes, however, the problem was not of compatibility but of class. As Sandra Myres explains:

> For some frontier women, no female society at all was preferable to "unsuitable" companions . . . . and many were willing to endure the longing for female friends rather than "lower" what they conceived to be their own status. (170)

Alderson, for example, during a short stay in a local town, was mortified to discover that she had almost suffered the indignity of publicly consorting with one of the West's most "notorious" prostitutes (115). Frontier women could avoid female companionship for other reasons as well. Some were simply too embarrassed to expose their poverty. Grace Snyder's mother, for instance, would often forbid her daughters to visit their neighbours because she could not clothe them in what she considered proper attire:

> "I'll not have the neighbors thinking poorly of us," she'd say, "and I'll not have you girls going off the place unless you're decently dressed in shoes and stockings." Those years on the homestead, one or the other of us usually didn't have decent shoes and stockings, so we didn't go off the place very often. (24-25)

But whatever the cause of their isolation, the central problem for frontier women was that, in order to speak, they required a listener and not just any listener but an appropriate listener. Most of the time this was precisely what they lacked.

Deprived of female conversation, or of free conversation with their men, frontier women could not fully communicate their conception of their selves to others. If this conception was not articulated, however, there was no proof of their autonomous existence. As Paul Eakin explains, "The imposition of silence, the denial of name, is tantamount to the extinction of personality" (257). As a consequence, some frontier women turned to a written voice, channeling their need for self-expression into various forms of writing. For these women, writing was a "way of breaking silences, that is, of finding avenues in which to speak, either directly or indirectly, about what [had] previously remained unspoken" about themselves (Bunkers, Studies in Autobiography 194).

Given that writing functioned as "a substitute for direct talk," it is not surprising that whatever genre of writing a frontier woman chose, whether diary, letters or memoir, she retained a structure and tone which imitated the conversational (Hampsten, Teaching Women's Lit 62). That is, she imagined herself talking to someone, usually another woman, and communicated to that person her perception of herself. Then, as in conversation, she waited for that person (or persons) to reply, to either accept or reject her self-definition. The writing process, like conversation, was a means of obtaining recognition for the autonomous self.

When Gayle Davis studied the diaries of frontier women, for instance, she found that diary writing "served as a type of meditative inner dialogue to replace longed-for conversation" (9). The frontier woman, lacking a confidante, created an imaginary one whom she could address through her writing. Often, the diary became a very real substitute for another woman, and some writers went so far as to address their diaries as if they were actual persons. Mollie Dorsey Sanford, for example, repeatedly refers to her diary as her "bosom friend" (38). Although she was surrounded by her mother, father, brothers and sisters, the area in which she lived was sparsely settled and she missed the companionship of young women her own age. Subjects such as her romance with a local young man were not the sort of thing she wished to confide to her family. So, instead, she told this and other secrets to her journal, referring to her entries as the confidential "little talks we have" (83) and beginning many of them with the phrase, "I have just a whole lot to tell you" (73). The audience Sanford envisaged had to be someone other than herself if she was to feel externally validated. Her imagined audience provided her with implicit acknowledgement of selfhood.

Letters also functioned as "a substitute for conversation" (Hampsten, Read This viii). Hilda Rose, for instance, sequestered first on an isolated stump farm in Montana and later on a homestead in Fort Vermilion, Alberta, would make such comments as, "I have no woman to talk to, so I will write to ease my brain" (30), or "I will write you a letter and try to put myself in it" (67). However, unlike diaries, in which frontier women had to envision an audience, letters approximated actual conversation more closely because they provided women with a real interlocutor as well as with the give and take characteristic of a vocal exchange. Still, Elinore Pruitt Stewart felt that at times even this process required amending in order to satisfy her longing for conversation. On one occasion, she went so far as to write a letter composed entirely of dialogue, imagining all the while that her addressee was seated there before her. She explained, "I feel just like visiting to-night, so I am going to 'play like' you have come," and then proceeded to begin her "pretend" conversation: "It is so good to have you to chat with. Please be seated in this low rocker . . ." (137).

Even in memoirs, it is not unusual for the writers to address their readers as if speaking to them in conversation. Sarah Ellen Roberts, for instance, when commenting on the luxury of having fruit for Christmas, writes in her memoir Alberta Homestead: "I am sure that you who have such things often cannot imagine how they tasted to us" (259). Frontier women give the impression that, when writing their memoirs, they imagined themselves engaging the world in a conversation. They often anticipate readers' reactions to what they are saying and attempt to rebut them. Agnes Morley Cleaveland, for instance, refers to her hunting experiences in her memoir and anticipates their reception: "Male hunters will probably scoff at the impressions which were uppermost in a girl's mind and which have remained vivid throughout the years" (205).[10]

When frontier women anticipated the reactions of their audience, they were acknowledging the importance of the reader to the process of public affirmation. Validation of the frontier woman's self depended to a certain extent on someone else, and, therefore, this someone else--the reader--held a great deal of power. Readers could recognize or deny the writer's selfhood. Moreover, although frontier women were seeking recognition for their "selves in hiding," they did not want to expose themselves to contempt or ridicule in the process of getting it. As Anne Ellis explains in her memoir: "We all hide better feelings than we display. The fear of being laughed at is such a strong fear" (Ordinary Woman 75). Consequently, frontier women were extremely conscious of their audiences. They anticipated their audience's reactions to their stories and tailored their strategies of self-revelation accordingly. The more receptive the audience was perceived to be, the more revealing their writing was. Conversely, the more unreceptive the audience, the more cautious the writer was.

Generally, the more private the audience was, the more receptive it was perceived to be and the more open and honest the writer could be. The diaries of frontier women, for example, often reveal the most about the inner workings of their minds. Their audience in this case was an imaginary one and so could be made to correspond exactly to their needs. The audience they imagined for themselves was often an ideal listener or, as Elizabeth Hampsten has described it, "a second self who [could] be depended upon for her interest, her empathy, her acceptance and lack of reserve" (Read This 104). Mollie Dorsey Sanford, for example, thought of her diary as a "bosom friend" and wrote that because it functioned as an ideal listener, it allowed her to "say with perfect impunity, anything about anybody' (18). She makes it clear that she could not speak openly about herself in such a way: "What should I do without my journal! I have Mother and the girls to talk with, but I cannot talk as freely to them as to this, my 'bosom friend.' I might be reproved and not always appreciated" (38). Emily French's diary similarly acted as a surrogate confidante. French desperately wanted a companion, someone in whom she could entrust her thoughts and feelings. Not finding one, she turned to her diary instead: "I came here in this little lonely bare ground cabin to sit and write in this dear & only friend I seem to have, it will never go back on me" (98).

Still an imaginary audience could not provide a frontier woman with real public validation. There are signs, however, that craving outside recognition, many frontier women harboured a desire to make their private writings public. Judy Lensink cites "alterations detected in" diary manuscripts as one such sign (47). She writes: "This inability to leave well enough alone suggests that an autobiographical impulse to potentially go public lurks within those who persist in keeping the diary" (47). This urge to go public can be explained by the fact that diaries, because of their privacy, allow writers to confide their most intimate thoughts and feelings. Often these are the thoughts and feelings they would most like others to know but are too shy to reveal. The writer is torn between wanting privacy and publicity. Such was the case with Emily French who wished that others could know what she confided only to her diary. She wrote: "How I suffer, shall anyone ever know?" (18).

When frontier women wrote letters, they were forced to contend with a real--versus ideal--audience. With a real audience, the writer had to take into consideration the expectations of her reader. Usually frontier women wrote to other women, most often close friends but, sometimes, only acquaintances. By confiding in other women, frontier women took only a limited risk, for they were revealing themselves to someone they perceived to be like themselves. Still, frontier women could receive either acceptance or censure from their peers for their thoughts and behavior. Elinore Pruitt Stewart's letters, for example, illustrate the kind of manoeuvers frontier women had to make in order to have their audiences continue the essential task of reading their writing. Stewart was extremely proud of her accomplishments and liked to talk about them in her letters to a former employer, Mrs. Coney. In the era of the cult of True Womanhood, however, it was considered to be unfeminine for a woman to boast about herself, and it was especially impolite for a woman to ignore class distinctions and present herself as superior to those of higher status. The result was that Stewart found herself having to appease her audience and apologize for her impertinence while at the same time trying to continue writing about herself, albeit in a less conspicuous way. She wrote:

> From something you wrote I think I must have written boastingly to you at some time. I have certainly not intended to, and you must forgive me and remember how ignorant I am and how hard it is for me to express myself properly. (62-63)

In addition to this apology, Stewart also strove to make amends by contritely changing her closing from "Your sincere friend" to "Your ex-Washerlady."

The power of a frontier woman's audience to either recognize or deny her constructed self can also be seen in Monica Hopkin's letters. Hopkins had determinedly tried to redefine herself, to go from being a silly, slightly irresponsible young girl to a mature, competent young woman. Her family, however, refused to acknowledge any such change in her. Although her feeling that she was misunderstood permeates her letters, there is one incident which illustrates her distress most poignantly. While on a visit to Calgary, she had a set of photographs taken of herself. She decided to to give a copy to both her husband and her family and selected the picture which she felt most reflected her new self. She told a friend that she had wanted to show them "the real Monica, not the flippant girl they had known" and went so far as to describe the photo as "the dead spit of 'The Soul's Awakening'" (62). When her husband saw the photograph, however, he declared that she looked "like a sick calf" (62). Her family were no more appreciative, her mother saying, "Oh my darling, I can't bear to look at it. You look so sad and ill it makes me want to cry. I have put it away in my drawer under my underwear," while her father commented, "You look drawn and careworn, healthy enough, but the life evidently tells!" (63). Her husband's and her family's failure to see Hopkins as she saw herself deeply distressed her: "When I think of all the dollars and dollars I spent on those ungrateful creatures, I could weep! . . . my feelings are badly shattered" (63).

Frontier women had to be even more conscious of their audiences' potential reactions when they wrote memoirs, for their memoirs targeted a larger, more public audience than their letters. Because they know that they are opening up their lives to the public's scrutiny and offering themselves up to the public's judgement, frontier women reveal less of themselves in memoirs than they do in letters and diaries. Judy Lensink describes the way in which a woman's voice becomes less and less honest the more public her audience becomes:

> I liken reading a diary to watching a young child at play. If you can catch her in a private moment, you come close to hearing her real voice; once she knows you are listening, however, that voice becomes adulterated, then

> becomes even more modified for a larger audience. (44)

Still, even when they were writing memoirs, frontier women were seeking recognition and acceptance from the public for their private selves. They were simply aware that at the same time they had to deal with the public's attitudes and expectations of women. The result was that they were forced to turn to various strategies of self-revelation. Sidonie Smith describes the woman memoirist's bind: "Acutely sensitive to her reader's expectations and to her own often conflicting desires, she negotiates a sometimes elegant, sometimes cramped balance of anticipated reader expectations and responsive authorial maneuvers" (50). Nannie Alderson, for example, when writing her memoir, was torn between wanting to talk about her relationship with her mother and how that relationship formed her personality, and needing to observe public mores about revealing such private, familial relationships to the public eye. The result was that Alderson revealed herself through a "selective use of speech and silence" (Bunkers, _Studies in Autobiography_ 191). She tells the reader, for instance, that, after her mother's marriage to her stepfather, she was not taken to live with them and her stepfather's children, but instead remained with her grandmother. Although her mother lived only five miles away, Alderson saw her only during occasional summer visits. Alderson, however, does not explain the reason for this arrangement, nor does she suggest how she felt about it. All she writes is:

> After staying a few days, I was taken back to Union to live with my grandmother in the village, and for many years thereafter my mother had me only for visits in the summertime. (5)

In another instance, Alderson writes of her mother's reaction to a very successful party she and her husband had held, despite their limited means, for their neighbours in Montana:

> There was much that I held back in my letters home, but I was really proud of this party, so I wrote and told my mother all about it, thinking she would be pleased to know how well we managed after all--even to entertaining nice people successfully--though we did live in a wilderness.
>
> She wrote back: "My daughter, I can't understand how you can invite people to your house when you can't make them comfortable." (194)

What the reader detects from such oblique comments is that Alderson's relationship with her mother was strained, mainly because Alderson and her mother were two very different kinds of women. While her mother adhered to gentility and True Womanhood, Alderson was closer to the resourcefulness of the Frontier Heroine.

On rare occasions, however, one discovers a frontier woman who used her memoir as an opportunity to speak openly and directly to the world. Anne Ellis is one such woman. Her two memoirs, The Life of an Ordinary Woman and Plain Anne Ellis, represent her first real attempts to confide her thoughts and feelings to others. Prior to writing the books, she had simply had no one to tell them to for, up until then, she had lived a very lonely life. Her class and her poverty kept her separate from other little girls and, later, other women. As a result, with no one to confide in, Ellis for years simply swallowed all the things she wanted to say. It was not always easy. She had what she called an "unruly tongue" which betrayed her need to be heard. Her life changed only after she had the good fortune to be introduced to a group of New Mexico artists. She told them some stories about her youth in the Colorado mining camps, and they encouraged her to write her life story. Finally, she felt the world was interested in her and what she had to say. She went to work immediately and wrote throughout the night: "I wrote, then warmed my cold, cramped hands underneath the covers, and wrote again" (Plain Anne 207-08). Everything she had kept bottled up for all those years poured out and her memoirs are punctuated with the remark, "This is the first time I have ever written or spoken of this" (Ordinary Woman 158). Thus, for Anne Ellis, writing her memoirs allowed her to speak openly with the world for the first time and to ask it to recognize her existence and take her into its fold.

Ellis's is a success story. She won not only recognition but acceptance. People responded so well to her first memoir, The Life of an Ordinary Woman, that she wrote a second, Plain Anne Ellis. She writes in the preface to Plain Anne Ellis:

> I want to assure readers of 'The Life of an Ordinary Woman,' who urged me to go on and tell 'what happened then' that I have written this book as soon as I could.
>
> Especially have I hurried for those who could 'hardly wait,' or were waiting 'patiently,' 'impatiently,' 'anxiously,' or 'eagerly.'
>
> And maybe you think I haven't rushed because of those who waited 'breathlessly'!

If, for frontier women, the act of writing their lives was an act of agency, an attempt to assert a self-definition, then the moment when these life-writings were read was the moment when their agency met the social determination of society. Ellis was successful because, once it was revealed, others accepted her self-definition. The public no longer saw her in terms of its bias about stereotypical working-class women, but as a fully developed real person.

* * *

For frontier women, the contradictions between cultural representations of Woman and their own personal experiences raised serious questions about female selfhood. The particular nature of the frontier seems to have played a role in this dilemma, for the frontier often placed women in situations that required them to behave in ways which conflicted with accepted norms of feminine behavior. Despite frontier women's diversity, many of them seem to have used life-writing to resolve the issue of uncertain selfhood. Life-writing allowed them to discover and articulate they ways in which they were both like and unlike cultural constructions of womanhood and to integrate these two aspects of themselves into a self which they felt truly reflected them. In the process of constructing this self they sometimes appealed to conventional images of Woman, sometimes wrote against them, and almost always ended up having to improvise something new, confirming once again that selfhood is "dialectically constructed both by cultural imposition and by [a woman's] own countering agency" (Schenck 291). The importance of this written self was that it first of all confirmed and reaffirmed frontier women's existence to themselves. But in addition to this, the writing process also allowed them to fully constitute this self's reality by enabling them to communicate this self to others so that they too could recognize and validate it. In short, the entire writing process seems to have been geared to creating and affirming an authentic and autonomous self, firmly placing frontier women's life-writing in the larger tradition of women's autobiography and its preoccupation with "constituting a female subject" (Schenck 286).

FOOTNOTES

[1] I have taken Suzanne Bunkers' lead and used the terms journal and diary interchangeably. She points out in her article "'Faithful Friend': Nineteenth-Century Midwestern American Women's Unpublished Diaries" that the distinction between "the diary as a form for the recording of events and the journal as a form for the expression of feelings" is an artificial one. Often, frontier women's private writings are a combination of both (Women's Studies International Forum 8).

[2]. For example, when Anne Ellis tried to sell stories of her life in Colorado's mining camps, she was told by the Atlantic Monthly that they were "not 'significant'" (Plain Anne 235).

[3] In the United States, the Homestead Act of 1862 made homestead lands available to women. Women who were the head of a family or 21 years of age could receive final title on 160 acres of land if they paid an entry fee of $14 and lived upon and improved that land for five years (Patterson-Black 5). "Later, under the Kinkaid Act, 640 acres of arid land could be claimed, and eventually the residence requirement was lowered to three years" (6). In Canada, however, homesteads were not open to wives or single women. Women in Canada could file a claim on a quarter section of land only if they were the head of a household (Harvest Yet to Reap 148).

[4] See also Women Have Always Worked, pp. 69-70.

[5] Memoirs, unlike diaries and letters, are subject to the vagaries of memory and, therefore, somewhat less reliable as historical sources.

[6] Annette Kolodny, in her book The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860, traces in extensive detail the development of sentimental romances set in the West and their portrayal of women. See also Prairie Women: Images in American and Canadian Fiction by Carol Fairbanks for a discussion of the image of the Frontier Heroine.

[7] See Nancy Cott's article "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850" for an in depth examination of the process by which women came to be seen as "passionless" versus inherently licentious.

[8] See Susan Stanford Friedman's essay "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice."

[9] See "Living Outside the Law" in Carolyn Steedmans' Landscape for a Good Woman, pp. 65-82.

[10] See Jane Marcus's article "The Private Selves of Public Women" in The Private Self. In it she argues that if there is "any common thread running through women's autobiographies," it "lies in the relation of the writer to her reader" (137). She writes: "the reader . . . resurrects the writer through reading her. This collaboration is a reproduction of women's culture as conversation. It does not occur in the male model of individualistic autobiography, where the reader is not expected to take such an active role" (137).

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APPENDIX

ALDERSON, NANNIE TIFFANY. Alderson was born in West Virginia in 1860, the daughter of one of the first Confederate soldiers killed in the Civil War and the step-daughter of a wealthy plantation owner. She moved to Montana with her husband to ranch in 1883. Her stories of frontiering were compiled by Helen Huntington Smith and first published in 1942 under the title _A Bride Goes West_.

ALLISON, SUSAN. Allison was born in 1845 in Ceylon where her father held a position on a coffee plantation. When she was four, her father died suddenly and the family returned to London. When the family's income began to decline, her mother remarried. The family emigrated to British Columbia in 1860, settling in Fort Hope. Four years later, her step-father abandoned the family. For a short time, Allison worked as a governess in Victoria, and later ran a school in Hope. At the age of twenty-three, she married John Allison, a man twenty years her senior. Despite her genteel upbringing, she agreed to follow him to his isolated ranch on the Similkameen River. She would later write in her recollections: "Then began my camping days and the wild, free life I ever loved till age and infirmity put an end to it" (21). She subsequently raised fourteen children, ran her husband's store, worked on their two ranches and became an expert on the customs and folklore of the Similkameen Indians. After her husband's death in 1897, Allison pursued her literary ambitions. She wrote "a long narrative poem of fifty-two printed pages" titled _In-Cow-Mas-Ket_ based on her observations of the Similkameen Indians as well as several short stories (Ormsby xliii). Later, several articles she had written for the _Princeton Star_ and the Okanagan Historical Society's _Reports_ came to the attention of the editor of the magazine section of the _Vancouver Daily Province_. He persuaded her to write her recollections of pioneer life. "Commencing on 22 February 1931, they appeared in thirteen issues of the _Vancouver Sunday Province_" (1). Allison died in 1937 at the age of ninety-two. In 1976, her memoirs were edited by Margaret A. Ormsby and published in book form under the title _A Pioneer Gentlewoman in British Columbia: The Recollections of Susan Allison_.

CLEAVELAND, AGNES MORLEY. Cleaveland was born in New Mexico in 1874, the daughter of a relatively well-known Sante Fe Railroad engineer and the "reigning belle" of Iowa. When her father was killed in a shooting accident, her mother remarried and the family relocated to a ranch in a sparsely populated region of New Mexico. Her step-father later abandoned the family. At the age of twelve she found herself functioning as the equivalent of a hired hand, spending long hours in the saddle, working with the cattle, riding twelve miles home with the mail in the middle of the night, and shoeing her own horse. When a local sheriff illegally confiscated her horse, she rode into town, started a stampede, threatened to "split [the sheriff's] skull wide open" with a cow bell, and retrieved her horse (119). When not working on the ranch, she attended first a Quaker school in Philadelphia and later the Universities of Michigan and Stanford. She called this her Jekyll-Hyde existence and said that it forced her to play "a sort of mental hopscotch, back and forth over that line between [her] life as a lady and the other one" (315). She later married and settled in California but continued to spend time on the family ranch. Her memoir No Life for a Lady was first published in 1941.

ELLIS, ANNE. Ellis was raised in the mining towns of Colorado in the 1880's and '90's. Twice widowed by her early twenties, she supported her two children by working as a seamstress and cook. Later, she twice ran for and won the position of County Treasurer. She was encouraged to write her memoirs by a group of New Mexico artists and called it "the most compelling, driving, hopeful, soul-satisfying interest I was and am ever to know" (Plain Anne 208). Her first memoir The Life of an Ordinary Woman was first published in 1929. Her second memoir Plain Anne Ellis was first published in 1931.

FRENCH, EMILY. French was born in Michigan in 1843. In 1858, at the age of fifteen, she eloped with Marsena French and later gave birth to nine children. After living for a number of years in Iowa, she and her family moved to Colorado. In 1889, after being married for thirty-one years, French and her husband were divorced. Her diary was written in the year 1890. It records her attempts to find work in and around Denver, Colorado, her ongoing battles with her ex-husband and her attempts to raise her two youngest children and support her invalid sister. Her diary was first published in 1987 under the title Emily: The Diary of a Hard-Worked Woman.

HOPKINS, MONICA. Hopkins was born in England in 1884, the daughter of a Wesleyan minister. In 1900, her father became the principal of the Wesleyan Theological College at McGill University in Montreal. It was while sailing to Canada that Hopkins, then sixteen, met her future husband, Billie Hopkins. In 1903, her family returned to England. In 1909, after Billie had built up a ranch in southern Alberta, Monica convinced her father to let her marry and move to Canada. Monica's letters to a female friend in Australia begin shortly after their arrival at their ranch in the same year. They document Monica's initial responses to her new life in the years between 1909 and 1911. In the 1940's, she rewrote and expanded upon these letters which were later given to a friend who donated them to the Glenbow Archives. They were published under the title Letters from a Lady Rancher in 1981. Monica died in 1974 at the age of ninety-one.

PARSONS, NELL WILSON. Parsons' was born in Iowa where her parents rented a farm. Because it was too expensive to buy a farm in Iowa, her parents decided to homestead in Saskatchewan. Parsons' memoir documents her experiences on that homestead between 1907 and 1918. Titled Upon a Sagebrush Harp, it was published in 1969.

ROBERTS, SARAH ELLEN. Roberts was fifty-four when she emigrated to Alberta from Illinois with her husband and three of her children in 1906. She and her husband hoped to make enough money through their homesteading venture to finance their sons' college educations and their own retirement. After six years, however, both she and her husband were in poor health and their sons were not prepared to continue farming the homestead, so they sold it and returned to the United States. Her memoir documents their experiences on their Canadian homestead in the years between 1906 and 1912. During their first winter in Alberta, Roberts kept daily notes, but could not find the time to continue this. In 1915, however, she returned to her notes and completed the story of their homesteading experience. Her son later edited the manuscript and it was first published in Canada under the title Of Us and the Oxen in 1968. It was published as Alberta Homestead: Chronicle of a Pioneer Family in the United States in 1971.

ROSE, HILDA. Rose, originally a school teacher in an eastern American city, came West when she contracted tuberculosis. She later married a man twenty years her senior and had one son. Her letters to female friends were first published serially in the Atlantic Monthly in 1927 and later in book form in 1928 under the title The Stump Farm. They record Rose's struggle to support her aging husband and young son first on a stump farm in Montana and later on an isolated homestead in Fort Vermilion, Alberta.

SANFORD, MOLLIE SANFORD. Sanford came with her family to the Nebraska Territory at the age of eighteen. She later married and convinced her husband to move to Colorado when she caught "Pikes Peak fever." Her diary records her experiences between 1857 and 1866, commencing with her family's move from Indianapolis to Nebraska and ending after the birth of her second child. In 1895, Sanford made a holograph copy of her journal and destroyed the original. The holograph copy was bequeathed to Sanford's grandson, Albert N. Williams, Sr., and first published under the title Mollie in 1959.

SNYDER, GRACE. Snyder was born in Missouri in 1882. She came to Nebraska with her family at the age of three. At the age of seven, she made three wishes: "to make the most beautiful quilts in the world, to marry a cowboy, and to look down on the top of a cloud" (13). She fulfilled all three of these wishes. She married Bert Snyder and with him built up a successful ranch in northern Nebraska. Her son became a pilot and used the small aircraft he bought to travel more quickly across the long distances on their ranch, often taking his mother with him. Finally, Snyder became known for her award-winning quilts. One of her most famous quilts, the Flower Basket quilt, hangs in the Nebraska State Historical Society Museum in Lincoln, Nebraska in a specially designed case. In 1980, she was inducted into the Quilters' Hall of Fame by the National Congress of Quilters of Arlington, Virginia. Her life story has been made into a documentary and has formed the basis for a play titled Quilters by Molly Newman. Snyder told her memoirs to her daughter Nellie Snyder Yost. They were first published in 1963 under the title No Time on My Hands. Snyder died in 1982 at the age of 100.

STEWART, ELINORE PRUITT. Orphaned at a young age, she and her brothers and sisters remained with their grandmother and continued to farm the family's homestead in Oklahoma. She later married and moved to Colorado. When her husband was killed in a railroad accident, she supported her daughter by first working in the furnace room of a Denver hospital and then filed on her own homestead in Wyoming. In order finance her homesteading venture she worked as a housekeeper for a Wyoming rancher. She later married this man but steadfastly refused to accept any assistance from her husband, fulfilling all of her homesteading requirements on her own. Her letters, written to a former employer, cover the years between 1909 and 1913. They were first published serially in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1913 and 1914 and later in book form in 1914.